

CAROLINE'S CAREER



LELA HORN RICHARDS



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CAROLINE'S CAREER

By Lela Horn Richards

THEN CAME CAROLINE
CAROLINE AT COLLEGE
CAROLINE'S CAREER



They were out in the street now, in the deafening
roar. FRONTISPIECE. *See page 144.*

CAROLINE'S CAREER

BY
LELA HORN RICHARDS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
M. L. GREER



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To
CATHERINE

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CAROLINE'S CAREER

CHAPTER I

CHANGES

“MOVING,” mused Caroline, as she brushed the blue velvet portières and laid them carefully away in a packing box that yawned in the front hall, “wasn’t altogether exciting.” It was wearisome; her back ached from lifting boxes and baskets, from wiping down heavy tarnished frames that held priceless Kirtley portraits.

Her brain was a little befuddled too. Only a moment before she had put the solid silver, entrusted to her from her mother’s fair white hands, in the washtub that held kitchen utensils. An insult to Grandmother Kirtley’s immaculately preserved teaspoons and soup ladle! Never in their history had such a thing happened. Kitchen impedimenta indeed! In all their sacred, dutiful

years they had never so much as seen the inside of a kitchen.

“ Remember the time we moved here from Virginia? ” Caroline asked her sister Mayre, who was also busy with rugs and furniture. “ We had Leigh then.” Leigh, the elder sister and stay of the household, had married and moved East. “ And old Maumy Rachel.”

“ And Alison.”

Alison was the sister just older than Caroline who had married the rich Tevis McElroy and moved to Richmond.

“ A lot of help Alison was,” Caroline remarked, turning to the ancient volumes in the library. “ Do you suppose Major (her father had been Major to her since infancy) really wants to take all these antiquated histories out to the cottage? Here’s Bancroft and Parkman ——”

“ They’re not antiquated, I hope,” Mayre ventured.

The Major’s entrance at that moment put a stop to the argument.

Doctor Ravenel, a tall, fine-looking man with clear hazel eyes that held a kindly yet somewhat searching expression, paused in the disordered room, smiling pleasantly.

“Where is George?” he inquired, glancing about. “You should not be lifting these heavy things.”

Caroline laughed good-naturedly.

“George, unfortunately, can only be in one place at a time, Major. He’s halfway to Broadmore now, with the best china.”

“And Martha?”

“Martha’s in the attic helping mother sort Kirtley heirlooms. Mother rather insists upon the old trunks going with us; and Leigh’s high chair and mahogany cradle ——”

“But, my child, in a cottage?”

“Exactly. That’s what I said. I threw up my hands.”

“Well, if Mother wants them,” Doctor Ravenel said hesitatingly, “of course they must go. I can quite understand about the cradle. You were all rocked in it. But the trunks. What have they in them?”

“Oh, odds and ends. Grandmother Kirtley’s wedding garments, and Mother’s; your wedding suit — lovely, Major, it is, too. Tails a yard long. Mercy, Mayre, you aren’t putting books with pictures! You are as bad as I am.”

Mayre ran a begrimed hand across a tired brow.

“ I do feel a little dazed,” she admitted, with a slow smile. “ But we are almost through. I think this is the last load. The old house begins to look empty. Oh, dear, I do hate to leave it.”

“ You hated to come into it, too,” Caroline reminded. “ It was painted red, you know. You detested the color. Remember how Mother scolded me for teasing you about it. My devil was out for exercise and I bantered you.” Her silvery laugh dropped to a chuckle.

Mayre sat down on a pile of books and looked about. The Major had gone back to his office rooms at the extreme end of the house. Caroline flung her dust cloth and attacked a musty volume.

“ Remember how we used to play hide-and-go-seek in the hall out there, and how Maumy Rachel would catch you by one wriggling arm when you ventured too near her kitchen? ” Mayre began reminiscently.

“ Dear old Maumy,” Caroline said softly.

“ And how Leigh would fret because we tore our frocks on that crazy corner that's splintered yet; it never would stay mended.”

“ Precious Leigh! ”

“ And the time Alison had her birthday party and you entertained her beaux in the hall upstairs. Maumy was furious! I remember to this day how she came down the back way and sent me scurrying for Mother. ‘ Dat lil debil of a Miss Caroline she done set up a party ob her own on the second landing,’ she said. ‘ Yes’m, she have, and I reckon Miss Embly better go up and settle her. She done got all Miss Alison’s beaux a-carrying her ice cream and cake, and a-dancin’ all over the corridor. Yes’m.’ ”

“ I know, I was incorrigible! That’s the night I fell in love with Jimmy Ludlow. Oh, but I had a case on him. He was such a dear. Remember, I had a patch on my nose; I had fallen off the flagpole at school. Major fixed me up.”

Mayre’s eyes traveled on to the front door, with its cloudy pane of glass. They both laughed, and Mayre said:

“ It wasn’t so funny then — not by any means, the day you asked me if I could write my name in the frost with my nose — and when I tried, you banged my head and the glass broke.”

“ And you will carry the scar to your death,” Caroline said, tracing the scarcely visible line on

Mayre's curved upper lip. "How you must have hated me!"

"You *were* a handful."

"Yes—I was; but I had such an adoring family. You were too patient with me. Oh, Mayre, how can we leave the old place? It's so full of memories—precious, precious memories. Why, it was just there, through that door, Leigh said good-by to us when she went away with Blair. Can't you see her now in her blue gown, her arm tucked through his, blowing kisses to us with her free hand? Oh, she was so dear and pretty!"

She paused for a minute, her eyes soft and dreamy.

"And it was upstairs," she went on presently, "up in the old guest room that little Hope left us. Just at hush time when everything was so still."

Tears filled Caroline's dusky eyes and fell upon her round, brown cheeks.

"Oh, Mayre, people aren't a bit fair to old houses. Homes that shelter them for the best years of their lives; give all they have for their joys and sorrows, and then, when they get old and shabby and run down, they go away and leave them; nail them up or turn them over to people who don't care a fig for them."

“But Father and Mother couldn’t live here alone, Caroline — with us away. Why, they would be lost in these big rooms.”

“Of course, I know — but it isn’t fair. I love every stick and stone of this old place; and somehow I feel that it loves me.”

“You are so imaginative.”

“No. Loyal——”

“That too; but after all a house is just a house.”

“Plus love and memories. You can’t sell *them*; they don’t go with the deed. Father hasn’t sold your garden out there.” She nodded to the window. “He hasn’t sold your honeysuckles and hollyhocks and coreopsis — they belong to old mother earth. Next year she will send them up again, cunning infants, cuddling in the sunshine, nodding in the wind.”

“Caroline, please ——”

The garden was Mayre’s one vulnerable spot. Her eyes filled.

“I’m glad you’re crying. You ought to. It wouldn’t be respectable or decent — or grateful if you didn’t. It’s a tribute to all the old place has given.”

Mayre never paraded her emotions. She strove generally to hide them.

“Where do you think I should pack this vase, Caroline?” she asked, making a dash for the mantel. “It is the one Great-grandfather Kirtley gave to Great-aunt Martha for a wedding gift.”

Caroline took it and tenderly wiped the dust from its delicate curves. “I’ll look after it,” she said. “It must be wrapped very carefully inside and out.”

Mayre reached for the vase.

“Perhaps Mother had better take it on her lap when she goes down in the car,” she said, and slowly mounted the stairs.

Two months and more had passed since Caroline’s graduation at the University of California. Two swiftly moving months; for with old acquaintances to be renewed, old haunts to be visited, new quarters to be selected, time had taken wings.

The rambling red house at the head of the avenue, so dear to Caroline’s childhood, had not been occupied by the family for some time. With Leigh’s marriage, Caroline’s and Mayre’s exodus to college, and old negro Maumy’s breakdown, it had seemed far too large for two lonely, middle-

aged people, so Doctor Ravenel had rented it to desirable tenants, removing his wife to a comfortable hotel until the children (Caroline and Mayre would always be children to him) returned to occupy it once more with them.

But Mayre and Caroline had returned with plans of their own, and the old home, in view of their extended absence, had seemed impossible of habitation. A search was immediately begun for a cottage, one that Mrs. Ravenel could manage with a trusty servant.

The immediate neighborhood had been searched, but nothing suitable found. Doctor Ravenel rather inclined to the suburbs; out Broadmore way, where their old neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Ludlow and their son Jimmy, had ventured a year before.

It was Caroline who discovered the bungalow, a house of six rooms set in a tangle of trees with a murmuring stream singing its way through the back yard, a clear, enchanting stream fringed with willows.

The natural beauty of the place had encouraged inspection. An early morning in July found the entire family tramping through the grounds, ex-

aminig entrances and exits, inspecting trees and shrubs.

“ I like it immensely,” Caroline announced after the first round. “ Isn't it pleasant? ” The large living room, with its beamed ceilings, its French windows opening on a wide veranda, its ample hearth, was hospitably inviting.

Mayre looked on with dreamy, half-closed eyes.

“ Yes, I like it too,” she said. “ I can see it furnished with mother's beautiful old things. But it must be kept simple. Soft white curtains to billow in the breeze at those west windows; blue Chinese rugs on the floor — willow furniture on the veranda.”

“ Chinese rugs, indeed! ” her father said, giving her small pink ear a pinch as he passed her on his way to the bedrooms. “ Where do you propose to get them? ”

“ With the money that is left from the old house when you sell it,” she retorted quickly. “ You have no more girls to educate and can afford to indulge Mother's whims now and then.”

Mrs. Ravenel smiled her appreciation. “ Mayre is quite right, Doctor,” she said. “ Soft blue rugs would be most harmonious with this cream wood-

work and beveled glass, and as Mayre says, we shall feel a little less cramped now.”

Caroline flashed a loving look in her mother's direction. The old adoration had not lessened. Mrs. Ravenel was still the center of the family's universe. Time had dealt very gently with her. She had grown a little stouter with the years, but her form still held attractive curves; her hands, heavily ringed with handsome Kirtley jewels, were, as always, white and soft.

Fortune favored an early sale of the old red house. Its location was greatly to its advantage, and, as Mayre had suspected, there was a handsome profit for rugs.

It was early August when dismantlement came. Extra people were called in to assist Martha, the colored cleaning woman who had helped since old Maumy's departure, and her son George, a man of all work about town. There had been many sighs as pictures were lifted from ancient hooks, bookcases emptied, cupboards cleaned, for the place had been a real home.

Mayre carried the vase up to her mother, while Caroline turned her steps toward the tower room, a sanctum that had been wholly hers. She opened the creaking door slowly. Two years had passed

since she turned the key in the rusty old lock and it moved stubbornly.

As she had suspected, the room was close and cobwebby, but she entered wistfully, throwing up the south windows and standing for a moment to drink in the view that met her eyes.

“Still here, old man of the mountain!” she said, waving a salute to the stately Peak that had been so much a part of her childhood. “Good morning. ‘Hope ah sees y’ well,’ as old Maumy used to say.”

She turned to a battered desk standing between the west windows and sat down in a dilapidated swivel chair that had once matched it. For a while she sat staring at the mountain, sometimes lifting a dusty hand to push away tears that insisted upon running down her cheeks.

“I wish I could take you with me to New York,” she said, turning at last to the desk and tracing its scars affectionately, “old, and ugly and scratched as you are. I shall always adore you. But I suppose the time has come to say good-by. Mr. Metcalf (the new owner) will soon be making kindling wood of you, or donating you to a rummage sale.”

She opened the drawers, one by one, and threw



It was a faded slip of paper. *Page 13.*

the contents on the floor, — old notebooks, scraps of manuscripts, clippings from newspapers, a few letters.

“ I am not even going to sort you,” she said to the indiscriminate mass fast growing into a pile, but she did stoop to save a slip of paper that had fallen with the rest, and a glow trailed a brown cheek as she held it to the light.

“ Funny that I should find this — to-day,” she whispered.

It was a faded slip of paper, dusty and time-stained, but she held it against the light and smilingly read the words that were written upon it.

“ September the fifteenth, 19 —
“ The Mesa, four o’clock.”

She reached into the depths of a pocket and brought up a letter of the same chirography, — a masculine hand that, from its closely connected letters, denoted neatness and attention to detail.

It was dated London, July 20, ——. It began:

Dear Caroline: —

Mother and I are sailing for home the day after to-morrow. To say that we can scarcely wait for the ship to move is putting it mildly. After two years in this devastated, heart-broken region I

am anxious to set foot on native soil, to learn to smile and laugh again under the Stars and Stripes. I am quite fit again and heartened for the journey home. Mother is well, and, as usual, sends a great deal of love to all the Ravenels. We took time while in this vicinity to look up Madame Wakefield, your erstwhile friend, and received a royal welcome. She lives in a splendid old place, quite regal in fact, with numerous servants to wait upon her and care for her vast estate. But she is sadly changed. The war has played havoc with so many of these English women.

Am leaving further news of Madame and her many messages until I see you. We shall reach home about the fourteenth of August, if all goes well, and I am expecting you to keep that oft deferred tryst with me out on the mesa — on the fifteenth. For two years I have pictured you waiting for me there (in that white sport suit you wore the last time we went up in the cañon — remember? The rain almost spoilt it) with the wind blowing your skirts about you, your hand shading your eyes, as you look toward the road (you see I don't forget your poses) watching for Pinto and me. Am I presumptuous in thinking you will wish to see me? If I am — then — there is no need of coming home — for *home*, Caroline, means only you.

As always,

JIMMY.

Caroline took the slip of paper that had so long reposed in the bottom drawer and pinned it to

the letter, returning them both to her pocket. There was a curious expression on her face, an eager, yet somewhat troubled look, but her lips parted in a smile. As she swept the litter into an ample wastebasket that stood near, she hummed a little tune. She was not so depressed as she had thought she would be when she finally closed the door to the tower room. The old association had been pleasant, but life was full of associations and the future looked rosily promising.

She found her mother in the adjoining attic, comfortable on an old sofa, giving instructions to Martha.

“ Ah, darling, I am glad that you have come,” she said, reaching out a hand and pulling Caroline down beside her. “ We are almost through. I was just saying to Martha that I think with a little replenishment this sofa would be fine for your studio; it could be shipped with your other belongings. This old chair, also. I can so well remember when it graced my mother’s drawing-room. It always stood near one of the heavy card tables. It is very hospitable with its wide arms. Done over in a flowered cretonne, perhaps — but Mayre will know about that. Her taste is always excellent. And these old daguerreotypes. They

might be interesting, and you shall have some pictures and linen. I want to think of you as cosy and comfortable."

An arm stole around Mrs. Ravenel's neck.

"You are always so thoughtful, Mother, and so generous. The sofa will be marvelous (there were still streaks of college enthusiasm in Caroline's vocabulary) and we should adore the chair. I love it, even with the old horsehair covering. It looks as if it had *belonged*, you know."

Mrs. Ravenel smiled. Caroline had touched a sympathetic chord.

"If that chair could speak ——" she began.

"It would tell of the blue blood of the Kirtley's ——"

"And the old friends who once came to my mother's home ——"

"And of all the elegance ——"

"Of the days before the war."

The conversation had become a duet. Mrs. Ravenel suggesting, Caroline supplementing. She knew just where to come in; all the shades and tremors, the low notes and the high.

Suddenly Caroline moved closer and the arm about her mother's neck tightened.

"Mother."

“ Yes, dear.”

“ I am going to ask a tremendous favor.”

“ What is it? ”

“ Do you think — would it be possible for you to give me one more gift? Something I would rather own than anything in the world? ”

“ What, Caroline? ”

“ I am almost afraid to ask, Mother.”

“ There can be no harm in asking, dear child.”

“ It’s Great-aunt Caroline’s portrait. I’ve always wanted it. I should prize it so. I’ve adored it — ever since I was so high.” She measured a hand’s breadth from the floor.

Mrs. Ravenel seemed pleased rather than annoyed.

“ I see no reason why you should not have it, Caroline.”

“ Really! Oh, Mother, it would give the studio such a terrible elegance! ”

“ Terrible? ” Mrs. Ravenel’s delicately arched brows lifted.

“ Well, — splendid then — you know what I mean. It would raise the tone — give us a background.”

“ I understand. Will you see to the packing? ”

“ Will I? Just try me! ”

Martha had put the cover on the last box and stood quietly waiting for further orders.

“That will be all—up here, thank you, Martha,” Mrs. Ravenel said with her accustomed courtesy. “You may go back to the kitchen and continue packing the utensils there. I think we shall be ready to leave the house this afternoon.”

“Do you hate going, Mother?” Caroline asked, watching the clear brow for a change of expression.

“Hate, Caroline?”

“Dislike.”

“The breaking up of a home is always a sad event.”

For a moment they sat in silence, each busy with old memories.

“I had a letter from Jim Ludlow this morning,” Caroline said presently.

“Indeed?”

“He will be home soon, with his mother. The fourteenth.”

“I am very glad. They are well? Jimmy has gained his strength after his sad ordeal in France?”

“He says that he is quite fit.”

Again there was silence. Mrs. Ravenel's glance

was wistful as she looked into her daughter's serious face. There were questions that she longed to ask, but she could not. When Caroline was ready to confide in her she would bring her problems. A reference to them would be an intrusion.

CHAPTER II

OLD MEMORIES

THE Abbey, Doctor Ravenel had laughingly dubbed the cottage on his last visit. Although it was modern and unpretentious there was an English atmosphere about its pointed, moss-colored roofs, its rambling ells, and creeping ivy; an ecclesiastical appearance, accentuated by the silence that enwrapped it.

A winding road led to its seclusion, but the view from the wide veranda was broad and sweeping. Mrs. Ravenel liked the quiet, even the solitude. She was seldom lonely. She had her books and pictures; her correspondence, her dainty sewing, and Doctor Ravenel would always be at home in the late afternoons, before the early Colorado dusk closed down over the mountains.

“ Sure, quite sure, you won’t find the place a little lonely, Mother dear? ” Mayre asked, feeling positive of the answer.

“ No, dear child; I shall have much to amuse and entertain me. And you will write often.

There will be many letters — with you all so far away.”

There was a pathetic droop to the brave voice for all it protested so courageously.

“ Let us have family round-robins,” Caroline remarked. “ You can write to Leigh and let her send your letters to all the rest of us.”

Mrs. Ravenel shook her head.

“ That would rob my daughters of their own personal share in my love,” she answered.

The cottage was quite settled now, even to the Chinese rug that graced the living room. Mayre, with her usual discrimination, had made the little house really beautiful. The drawing-room (such Mrs. Ravenel always called it) held the rare old pieces of Kirtley furniture; the stately card tables stood either side of the hearth, tidy with books, photographs and flowers; the old sofa was before the open fire; and there were the simple “ creamy curtains billowing,” as Mayre had suggested, at the open sunny windows.

The bedrooms looked rather odd with the heavy mahogany furniture, the highboys, and pineapple posts of the great beds rising almost to the low ceilings, but that did not trouble Mrs. Ravenel. She would not have parted with one of her treas-

ures (except as a gift to her children) however incongruous and out of place they seemed in a modern bungalow.

The old portraits were all in place. Grandfather Kirtley, splendidly regal, looked down benignly from the space above the mantel. It was not just the place for him, Mayre thought, eyeing him through her dreamy, half-closed eyes, but after all, he exactly fitted the space and it would be pleasant for Mother to look up at him when she toasted her dainty, slippered feet before his ancient andirons.

“Seems to me nothing could be more charming than this little place,” Caroline said, giving it a sweeping glance when all was settled. “I should call it Paradise with that heavenly brook boasting its charms in the back yard and the flowers backing it up.”

A servant had not yet been secured. Martha continued to give two days a week to cleaning and ironing, but both Mayre and Caroline loved to busy themselves in the blue-and-white kitchen with its tiled sink and freshly scrubbed tables and pantries. They loved to set the table on the little porch adjoining the dining room that overlooked a well-kept garden, bright with zinnias, petunias

and four-o'clocks. Money had stretched far enough to permit the cosiest breakfast set; a round table, to whose creamy surface Mayre had added stripes of delectable blue and old rose. The chairs matched, just four of them, — cunning little old-fashioned cane-seated chairs resurrected from the red-house attic and painted to correspond.

The quaint china, banded with blue, gave the service an extra charm, and Doctor Ravenel scarcely ever sat down to breakfast or dinner without drawing a happy breath, remarking as he drank in the perfume of Mayre's garden along with the pure, tangy Colorado air, "I agree with Caroline; this is Paradise!"

The electric stove in the tiny kitchen was also an innovation. From its accommodating interior came cakes, and custards in wee brown bowls. Caroline even learned the mysteries of nut bread, and sweet Southern ham, sliced and baked in milk, — one of Maumy's rare recipes. Came also the brownest of muffins and feathery white biscuits, and sometimes gingerbread that sent a fragrance through the house, even down the crooked path that led through a white wicket gate to the highway.

The happiness of those early August days was

marred only by the thought of an early separation.

“ But we shall be coming home every summer — that is, if we make enough money,” Caroline comforted, when the subject was under discussion. “ And of course we will. Mayre’s water colors are bound to take, they’re so fascinating; those bits of the sea and mountains. And as for me, why, before you know it, Major, you will be leading Mother up to the Opera House (always so called) to see a play produced by the famous Caroline Ravenel. *Ravenel*: the old Virginia Ravenels! Great-granddaughter of the illustrious Captain Kirtley, also of Virginia.”

Doctor Ravenel would smile, a bit sadly, Caroline sometimes thought, and reply:

“ Of course; you were born to succeed, Caroline. When a woman makes up her mind —— ” The sentence ended in a laugh.

Mrs. Ravenel had not altogether approved of her daughters’ venture in New York. Her Southern blood rather rebelled at the thought of publicity. Women belonged in homes. She had very little patience with the modern freedom given them. They wielded a greater power behind their husbands; and her dearest wish for Caroline and Mayre was a successful marriage.

The second week in August found Caroline restless. She took long walks; they were not far from one of the most beautiful cañons. She sat by Mayre as she sketched and painted, listless and distraught. Sometimes Mayre turned toward her in surprise.

“ Not low to-day, are you? What’s the matter? Look at those lavender tints in old Cheyenne. Isn’t he superb? If I could only get those deep shadows without making them look like caves —— ”

“ You are doing splendidly ; I was just admiring your skill,” Caroline would remark, jumping up to send a pebble dashing against a young sapling, or to take a run up the mountainside; restless, moody, noncommittal; quite unlike herself, Mayre thought.

She noticed it particularly on the morning of the fourteenth. It chanced to be Saturday and they were in the kitchen, storing up food against the morrow’s need. Caroline was clumsy. She dropped dishes, breaking one of the blue-lined plates that had weathered many a careless maid’s régime since Maumy’s departure. She flew from one thing to another, upsetting her mother’s favorite fern that thrived in the east window ; spilled

a bottle of milk over Martha's shining kitchen floor.

" Butterfingers! " she cried, quite annoyed. " What's the matter with me? "

" I am afraid you have been doing too much lately," her mother said anxiously. " Settling a house is a difficult and exacting task."

" No, I am not tired," she flung back, wandering into the living room to sink down on the comfortable sofa, chin deep in hands. Magazines were substituted for books and both discarded; a half-hemmed napkin claimed her attention for awhile but sewing palled. Finally she rose, lifted her lithe young arms over her head and stretched comfortably.

" Think I'll pack a few sandwiches and take a hike up the cañon," she said, turning toward the kitchen.

" I will go with you," Mayre suggested. " The baking is all done."

" I'll be stupid company, Mayre; better choose another day."

" Meaning that you prefer to tramp alone."

" Do you mind? "

" Not in the least. Mother and I are going over to see Mrs. Ludlow for a minute late this

afternoon. She and Jim got in yesterday, sooner than they were expected. Martha stopped there on her way out. Says Jim looks fine — but thin.”

There was no reply, but an eager light replaced the boredom in Caroline’s eyes.

“ She says he is stunning in his uniform. You know he got to be a Major or something; simply flew up the ranks.”

“ Yes, he would, naturally.”

“ He was always handsome,” Mayre went on.

“ Not handsome, Mayre. I detest handsome men; just honestly good-looking — with an air perhaps.”

“ That’s what Martha says.”

“ Yes’m,” Martha interrupted, with the familiarity of a faithful servant. “ Yes’m, he looks pow’ful highfalutin; lak he could jes blink a eye and folks’d square theirselves.”

“ You say he is thin, Martha? ” This from Caroline.

“ Yes’m, but not sickly, no’m. He ain’t changed none — ain’t got nary a scratch on him. Seem lak he got a sure nuff charm life, Miss Caroline, all them big battles he done gone through over yander! ”

Caroline rummaged through the icebox for cold

ham and cheese, made a half-dozen sandwiches, adding a cake of sweet chocolate as she stuffed them into her sweater pocket. She had reached the front door when she came back.

“Martha,” she called, “please don’t forget to press the pleats in that white flannel sport skirt I left on the foot of my bed. I am going to need it to-morrow.” Then she was gone — out through the little white gate, swinging with her long steady stride into the carriage road that led to the cañon.

It was a perfect morning. Over the old Peak fleecy clouds drifted, snowy white against the deep blue sky.

Caroline loitered leisurely, stopping now and then to watch a flight of birds or call to a saucy chipmunk that hurried across the road with his store of winter groceries. It was after she took the trail up the mountain that she hurried her gait. She could never wait for the view from the top. Its magnificence always, for a moment, took away her breath.

To-day the atmosphere was particularly clear, the air so thin that the little village snuggling in the lap of the long blue range seemed miraculously near. Almost she could reach out and lay her

hands on the church spire glittering in the sunshine, count the peaked roofs that sheltered old neighbors, or the flat tops of business buildings.

She sank down presently, clearing a spot of hard, sweet-scented pine cones. The sandy earth, warm and comfortable after her stiff climb, seemed a bed of ease as she stretched out, gazing up into the big, sapphire dome that, before her college days, she had always associated with heaven.

A half-hour went by. The warmth, the music of the falls dashing over the near-by rocks lulled her into a half-doze.

She sat up after a while and took her field glass from the leather case she had strapped across her shoulder. She could see the Abbey below. She liked its peaks and ells, though Mayre had thought, from the point of architecture, it was rather too churchy. At any rate there it stood, sheltered and protected by its vines and trees; snug, peaceful, homelike.

Mayre, as usual, was puttering about the garden, weeding here, pruning there, loosening earth that too tightly bound her favorites. Mayre was a born gardener. Caroline always thought of her with a trowel in hand, a broad, limp hat shading

her eyes. How was Mayre going to stand the big city? New York with its swirl and hum and rumble; its underground and elevated nuisances. How — but of course there was her art. That counted for a great deal. She could work and study. They would both be so occupied.

Mrs. Ravenel was on the veranda in her white morning gown, stitching on a tea cloth. She was always embroidering or marking linen. Sometimes Caroline wondered how she could endure the monotony of those tiny stitches, through and back, through and back, the embroidery hoop endlessly turning. The very thought of it made her squirm and impatiently dig her toes in the soft loamy earth. She hated sewing.

She had kept her glass persistently turned from a cottage a block or two away from the Abbey, but now, as if the impulse were almost beyond her control, leveled it and took a long, sweeping glance.

“ I am glad he isn't there,” she said, convincing herself that the place was quite deserted. “ It wouldn't be fair — spying on him first. He said — to-morrow — the fifteenth. Jim! ”

She breathed the word faintly, but a thrill of joy shot through her. Jim, alive and well. Home!

After all those terrible months in France. Here — *here* — only a stone's throw away.

The blood bounded to her cheeks and pounded at her temples; again a tremor went through her. It was not the first time that she had experienced that thrill. Years before, when she was eleven, he had brought her a dish of pink ice cream — this same Jim — and danced a two-step with her around the upper hall of the old red house.

But Alison had claimed him in those days, until she went South and met Tevis McElroy, the rich young Virginian, and married him. That marriage, however, had witnessed the beginning of Jim's friendship for her, — Caroline. She had felt so sorry for him. During the following summer they had long strolls together, though she was but twelve and he eighteen.

Then came a break; Jim left for college in the East. But letters came irregularly: funny little scrawls, sometimes with pictures, — drawings embellishing the corners; crude cartoons describing his conquests at football or shortcomings in other directions.

There had been vacations, too. Times when they romped over the mesa on the backs of Pinto and Minto, the sturdy Ludlow ponies. The friend-

ship ripened. There was always a mute understanding. Caroline scarcely knew when it began, but she knew that Jim loved her, that he was only waiting for the day when he could say to her fairly and frankly, "I have come for you, Caroline ——"

Yes, that was what he would say to-morrow when they kept the old tryst on the hilltop. They would welcome each other, shyly and decorously. They would gaze long and earnestly at each other, noting changes; then they would sit down on the broad flat boulder that had so often lured them in the sunshine; sometimes they had watched the sunset from its comfortable surface, side by side, each busy with dreams. Once, on a dare, she had slipped away at dawn and cantered to the spot with him to see the day break in golden splendor over the mountains. Could she ever forget that morning! No; not if she lived to be ninety. Jim in his smart riding togs, fresh from his morning plunge, his hair still damp under his sombrero. When the sun was well up they had dashed across the Garden of the Gods, stately and mystical in the early morning, the pines lending a tangy fragrance to the sharp thin air.

They had stopped for coffee and doughnuts in

front of a stand in Manitou and watched the tourists start away on diminutive donkeys for near-by hills and cañons; watched the strange procession move, laughing at the stubborn antics of the burros, the happy cries of delighted kiddies as they urged and clucked, whistled and shrieked, beat at the lazy beasts with sticks and switches. And over all, the wonderful Colorado sky — a huge inverted bowl — so blue above their heads; the road home through the thickening dust-cloud rising between them and the sun like filtered gold.

After a mad gallop of a mile or two, Pinto and Minto were allowed their own gait while she and Jim visited. Jim told of Princeton — the most beautiful campus in the world, he said, and she glimpsed its charms through his vivid descriptions. Sometimes they talked of her college days looming up in the distance. But she would go West — out over the mountains — to California. That was her dream.

That day had come at last. She did go West, out to the Golden Gate, but when she came home, Jim, somehow, had changed. He had finished college, was engulfed in his profession, the law. Sometimes she caught fleeting glimpses of him at work in his office. He was never too busy to talk

with her; he was always courteous, but no longer a playfellow. She stood a little in awe of his profession. Often when he came to the house to call, he engaged the Major in conversation, forgetting her presence. He was alive, keen and ambitious. When they rode together there were long silences from which he would awaken with a smile, his brilliant, ravishing smile that lighted a new world within him.

“My, but you were a long time coming out of that,” she would complain with a frown that gave place to a laugh. “I thought you were never going to speak again.”

He would turn then and put a friendly hand on the pommel of her saddle.

“Air castles, Caroline. I was building the future —— ”

“And leaving me out —— ”

“No —— ”

“But you looked so serious, Jimmy.”

His hand would slip from the pommel then and rest upon her own for a moment with a little pressure that sent a wave singing to her heart. But that was all: the little squeeze, his smile, the unmistakable light in his eyes.

Her first two years away at college had almost

meant alienation. She had been so full of her own activities. And — there was Biddy Webster.

Biddy Webster was a college idol. Caroline had enjoyed his attentions — Biddy was such a good sport — and Emma, his flaming red car that was so much a part of him. Biddy was handsome. He danced well. He stood well. He was a splendid pal, sympathetic and understanding.

A great deal of Biddy crept into Caroline's letters home, especially to Jim. Such lines as, "Went to the movies with Biddy this evening," or "Biddy and I danced at the Country Club," or "Biddy and I went on a long hike."

Sometimes the information, given Jim in large doses, was premeditated. She was paying him back for those old spells of indifference; those long evenings when he smoked with the Major and forgot her presence. There was a break once. He had asked her to write to him of herself, — things of general interest; Biddy with all his fascination palled a little, he said.

When she came home for her second vacation, Jim was downright queer. He called occasionally and they sometimes took long rides in his little roadster, but they kept to topics of general interest, and, as of old, he lapsed often into moody

silences. Sometimes she felt that the advent of Biddy in his big red car and his stay of a week added to those moods, though there were days when Jim was himself, bright and entertaining, sometimes startling her with a compliment.

Then came her Junior year — and war! War, hideous and grim. Awful!

Jim sailed for France before the United States became involved. But somehow, back of his generous spirit of helpfulness, Caroline suspected another reason, and felt strangely responsible. For some time she had noticed a recklessness, a smothered "don't care" attitude back of Jim's smiling indifference. Once she felt sure he had come very near asking her if she were engaged to Biddy, but his self-respect and appreciation for another's private affairs checked the words.

And Caroline's own heart became a treadmill of doubts and misunderstandings. Biddy was growing ardent too, and when he went away to war, she wondered if her feeling for him were, perhaps, warmer than mere friendship. She rejoiced when he came back well and unscathed. They resumed their old, happy relations on the campus. She enjoyed him more and more. He was so kind and considerate. At the end of her Senior year, while

she was visiting at his country home — a magnificent ranch that would some day belong to him — he had asked her to marry him.

She had put him off gently. She was not sure, though she liked him tremendously. She wanted time to think, for Jim's broad shoulders had wedged themselves between them; Jim looked at her with pleading eyes.

That was the situation to-day! Biddy, still loyal and ardent, awaiting her decision with patient hopefulness; Jim returning to claim his old place in her affection.

And between them, just as Jim had edged between her and Biddy, rose the ghost of her old ambition, beckoning, urging, encouraging her. From the time she could walk that ghost had led her footsteps, flattering and beguiling her. Before she was six she was staging plays on the old woodpile in the long triangular yard of her Virginia home. In high school she had given promise of future success. College had brought dramatic honors.

Could she give up her ambition for marriage? Marriage meant home and family. She wanted to be free. The thought made her dive into her sweater pocket for a letter Biddy had written.

But you could write here at the ranch, Caroline. Where could you find better material, a more restful, suitable environment? Father and Mother are turning over the place to me now; they want to travel for a few years, and if you will only decide, make me the happiest man in the Santa Clara valley by sharing it with me, I will promise you everything that devotion, even sacrifice can secure. I will build you a pergola down in the rose garden, the spot you said would be ideal for writing, and promise to leave you alone three fourths of the day, if the rest of the hours could be mine, mine alone.

A vision of Biddy's beautiful home swept before her eyes. She could see the attractive house, the charming grounds, the Chinese servants pattering about quietly.

She shook her head.

"It would never do," she said aloud. "I should be spoiled for any good work. Life would be too easy. I should dream, but never fulfill."

For hours she sat in the sylvan dell, fragrant with pines and mountain flowers. It was quite three o'clock when she thought of her lunch. A chill had crept over the place; shadows lay thick across the rocks and trail. She ate her sandwiches slowly, dividing with the chipmunks that ventured almost within reach of her hand. The

sun was sinking when she pulled herself together and started homeward.

If the morning had been beautiful, the late afternoon was doubly so. Although it was midsummer, the trees, high up, had tasted the first frost; already many of the leaves were tipped with scarlet and gold. The creeks were full, rushing and roaring by; the air heavier than earlier in the day but full of the wood's sweetness. She stopped once, scampering up a steep place to gather kinnikinick, thinking how she would miss its red berries at Christmas. She and Mayre had so loved to deck the old house with them. They toned up the faded rugs and pictures. She never failed when at home to wreath a bit around the portrait of Great-aunt Caroline — she scarcely knew why — except that she liked to keep her memory bright.

Dinner was on the table when she entered the house. Mayre was serving a generous steak and Martha trailed behind her with vegetables. The delicious odor of coffee floated in to her as she stopped in the bathroom (that separated her own room from Mayre's) to wash and arrange her tumbled hair.

As always, the table was inviting. Mrs. Ravenel

sat at the head, investing it with dignity and charm. She was still in white, but she had thrown a pink chiffon shawl over her shoulders. The tint brought out the deeper color in her cheeks and her eyes reminded Caroline of the late afternoon sky.

“ Did you make your call? ” Caroline asked casually, slipping into the place next to her father.

“ Yes,” Mayre answered, “ and we almost missed Jim; but he came in later —— ”

Mayre stopped to arrange the tray with the coffee cups that Martha was placing before her. She did not go on for a full minute. Caroline waited breathlessly. She did not wish to seem over-interested, but she could not resist, “ Oh, is that so? Was at his office, I suppose.”

“ Yes, Mrs. Ludlow says he could scarcely wait until he opened it up.”

“ He will have a lot to talk to you about, Major,” Caroline said, cutting into her steak hungrily. The sandwiches had not been altogether satisfying.

“ I fancy he will have more to say to you, my dear.”

Caroline's brown cheeks crimsoned.

“ To me? ”

Mayre laughed.

“ Oh, Caroline, don’t pretend. You know Jim has always been more interested in you than any of us.”

“ I suppose he didn’t ask for me? ”

“ He asked how we all were — you included, of course. Mrs. Ludlow felt quite slighted that you didn’t come with us. Especially when we told her you had gone off tramping. Why don’t you run over for a minute this evening? ”

“ I am very tired,” Caroline answered, hoping the conversation would continue, yet not wishing to pursue the subject of Jim’s return.

She helped Mayre with the dishes, for Martha’s day was over, but Mayre was unusually silent. Once she spoke of Mrs. Ludlow: she was looking well; had visited Leigh for a few days in New York (Leigh had married her nephew) and found her well and happy. Blair was doing splendidly in his father’s business. It was good to have direct news.

“ And Jim,” Caroline managed to venture during one of the long silences, broken only by the clatter of Mayre’s clean dishes as they were laid with precision in the rinsing pan, and the tick-tock of old Mr. Time, who had been placed between the

east windows. "Is he really quite well? Isn't he going to feel the effects of that awful gassing?"

"Not a bit! It is most extraordinary. Mrs. Ludlow says he had a marvelous nurse in the hospital where he was convalescing — a young French matron who had been widowed by the war and had given her life to the sick and wounded; she was perfectly devoted to Jim."

There was another silence. Caroline finished the last dish, hung the drying towel on the nail by the kitchen door, put a cloth over Bobby's cage — Mayre's fluffy yellow canary that hung in the bay window (Caroline loved that sunny window; it was so unusual in a kitchen) — brushed the porch, straightened papers and magazines that had been left on the swing, and went into the living room.

Doctor Ravenel's cigar was already aglow. He had pulled his easy-chair under the light and his paper lay spread upon his knees. Mrs. Ravenel was sitting near, a book open in her lap. Chow, the privileged Airedale, was stretched across the hearth rug, blinking into a lazy fire. August nights in the country are chilly in Colorado.

Mayre had thrown herself down upon the sofa, her arms under her head; her dreamy eyes, as usual, half-closed in thought.

Caroline took a sweeping glance.

“ You all look mighty comfy,” she said, and taking a late novel from the table, went into her own room.

CHAPTER III

SEPTEMBER THE FIFTEENTH

SHE heard him coming long before she caught sight of him. Pinto's hoofs ringing over the hard white road had roused her from the absorbing view in the west. Her back was turned to the road but she rose and faced it at the old familiar sound, her trembling hands clasped before her.

Nearer and nearer came the clatter of Pinto's hastened trot and the next minute the bend in the road had been turned and Jim's erect form, always at its best in the saddle, appeared in view.

Caroline tried to step forward, but her limbs refused to move. Her heart raced madly; the russet hue that always dyed her cheeks in any excitement spread to her throat; it flushed her whole being. Jim, so near her, after those anguishing days in France! Days of endless waiting!

He was beside her at last, giving Pinto the reins to wander at his will. Caroline moved forward a step, and then ——

She could never remember clearly what happened after that. She only heard his low, "Gypsy, Gypsy!" and felt his arms around her. Then his lips on hers. Appalled at her own emotion, she pushed away from him, looking up with tears in her eyes, half ashamed, wholly glad.

But he had taken her hands, both of them, in his strong brown ones (she had expected to see them pale and thin after his long illness) and was looking at her, his face aflame with happiness, his eyes warm and moist.

"So, so you are home again, Jim," she managed to stammer. "Home! Doesn't the word sound good to you?" She tried to lead him to the rock but he did not move.

"Please," he begged, "stand there just a minute until I prove to myself that I am not dreaming. So many times I have seen you here—in that dress. You did wear it for me."

Her old, care-free laugh bubbled.

"If you had written a day later the rummage sale would have claimed it. It's disgracefully old, Jim."

But he was not looking at the dress. He was examining her hand, the left one, and when he

found it free of ring he stooped and left a kiss upon it.

She struggled to free it from him, self-conscious and a bit miserable.

“Your trip,” she said, leading him to the stone where they so often sat. “I can scarcely wait to hear about it — and my messages from Madame Wakefield.”

But he was in no mood for messages and when his arm went round her she shrank a little away from him, though the hurt look in his eyes cut her to the heart.

“Jim — you mustn't. Please, Jim!” Her face was almost pathetic in her helplessness.

“Why, Caroline? Surely it is all right now. I have waited so long.”

“I know, Jim — but ——”

He looked down at her, half-frightened, his face paling a little under its coat of tan.

“What do you mean, Caroline?”

“Just what do you mean, Jim?”

“You know, Gypsy, I want you to marry me. At once. To-morrow. Why not? You are through college. That was the only barrier, wasn't it? You were so keen for an education.”

He lifted her chin and made her look up at him.

“ There are other reasons, Jim.”

He took a quick breath. His whole expression changed.

“ What possible reasons? ”

“ I am going away — East.”

“ What for? ”

“ To earn my living.”

“ But why should you earn your living when I am here to do it for you? ”

She could not speak for a moment. She was trying to find an easy way to tell him of her ambition. Presently she looked up. He was still gazing at her, with eyes a bit bemused.

“ You see, Jim —— ”

She stopped. It was going to be hard any way she put it. His eyes were laughing at her now.

“ I believe in the economic independence of my sex.”

“ I see. Woman stuff! ”

“ Call it what you like.”

“ You are a feminist, then? ”

“ I — I believe in —— ”

“ Women’s rights? ” The smile had changed to an indulgent laugh.

“ Perhaps — at any rate, the right to make an honest living; to exploit my talent.”

“ But you could do that here. You could write at home, if that's what you mean. I think I could manage a maid in our little home.”

His voice dropped, softened on the last word.

“ But you don't seem to understand, Jim. Writing is — is different from most things. One has to live, to create. I must travel and know people — lots of them — their experiences —— ”

He still was indulgent. “ We shall travel, Gypsy, some day. Just now I hate the word — after that awful hell over there.”

“ Oh, Jimmy, I know. Don't think about it; let us get it out of your mind.”

He shook his head sadly. “ It has gone too deep.”

She tried to cheer him, running on almost garrulously about their mutual friends, college, anything to take the sadness out of his eyes. But he went back.

“ Say in six months then, Caroline. I would be willing to wait that long while you visited Alison and Leigh.”

“ But I am not visiting Alison and Leigh — except for a short time. I'm setting up a studio in

New York with Mayre. She's going to paint and I am going to write plays."

The hand that lay on hers gripped tighter.

"No, no, Caroline."

"Yes, Jimmy."

"But you mustn't. I can't let you."

"I fear — you will have to."

He looked at her in amazement. But his eyes grew tender.

"I think that it is you who cannot understand," he said slowly; "if you only knew how I have thought of you, yearned for you — prayed, Gypsy; prayed that the good God, wherever He is, would spare me to you — and you to me. How I have worshipped you, for so long; way back when you were a little girl. It began that night, I think, when you were eleven — when we danced together in the hall — you remember. I carried a picture of you away to college. It used to stand in a little frame on my chiffonier by Mother's. Fellows ragged me about it — you were such an infant. But I used to talk to it, Gypsy. I used to say, 'I must keep straight and clean for you.' You always looked at me so frankly with those sunny eyes. Sometimes I could see them glowing in the dark. Sometimes they grew big and black

and tender. Sometimes they smiled — sometimes they rebuked me.

“ And then —— ” His voice had broken, but it went on, “ then you went away to college, and for awhile I thought that I had lost you — thought you loved some one else and I left for war not caring much what happened —— ”

“ Jimmy! ”

“ Life meant nothing to me without you. It doesn't now — it never will. Perhaps —— ”

“ Jim, stop. I can't bear it! ”

Her head had gone down in her hands. He lifted it gently.

“ You do care, Gypsy — you do. Say you do.”

“ I — I — oh, Jimmy, don't ask me, please. I don't know.”

She could not look at him. When she turned his face was buried in his hands. She got up and walked a little way from him, her hands pressed hard together, tears rolling down her cheeks. Presently she came back.

“ Jim,” she said, gently slipping an arm through his, “ would it help any if I told you that I think more of you than of anybody else? ”

He turned quickly. “ Then it's just a whim — this going away? ”

She straightened a little, moving farther from him.

“ No, Jimmy, not a whim. I fear it is much more than that. It is — my life.”

“ But you said you cared —— ”

“ I do —— ”

“ But your work comes first? ”

“ For the time — yes.”

He seemed dazed. He looked at her with uncomprehending eyes. How could the exploitation of a talent mean more than love?

“ You see ” — she had gotten her balance now — “ you see, I am so young, Jim, only twenty-two, and life is all before me. I want to do something — something worth while. I want to be free to do it my own way. If I should marry, there would be responsibilities.”

“ Then it is only time you want? ” His voice was eager.

She knew the question was coming, and tried to ward it off.

“ It’s going to take years, Jim. It would not be fair to you to wait. You are older than I — nearly seven years, though I never feel the difference. You are ready to settle down.”

She turned to look in his fine, clean-cut face.

He was in the first flush of his youth. A man, as old Martha had said, anybody would "square theirselves before." He was commanding; there was a dominant note about him, wholly masculine.

"You will not even consent to an engagement?"

He was sure of her again and she hated herself for not being fair. She wanted to say, "Jim, I think I love you, but I am not altogether sure; there is Biddy — he, too, is waiting."

But she could not. He was just home from his horrible experiences abroad. He was tasting the first happiness that he had known in two years. She couldn't; she had not the courage.

Silence grew between them. Jim sat staring off into the west, his brows in a puzzled frown. Now and then she looked at him, shy glances of which he seemed unaware. She had walked from home, carrying a white parasol. Now she dug its ivory tip into the damp, sandy earth making little piles of dirt around her white shoes. A scattering clod fell upon them. Jim drew a spotless handkerchief from his pocket and brushed the sand off.

She yearned to speak to him, to reach out and lay her hand in his, but something had come between them.

He put the handkerchief in his pocket, pulling

it out again to transfer it higher up in his coat. Something came with it; a tiny satin box. It fell at Caroline's feet. She picked it up. Her fumbling made the spring open. A solitaire sparkled in the sunshine. Her eyes swam with tears. She closed the box and handed it back to him. He dropped it in his pocket carelessly.

“ Jim — oh, if you only knew how I hate to hurt you. And just now. Now, when you ought to be happy! ”

He was silent again. For a long time he did not speak. They both sat looking off into the west.

“ It's a great old world,” he said finally, with a sigh. “ There was a chap with me on the other side; splendid fellow. We managed to keep together until —— ” A shudder passed over him. “ He had a girl over here somewhere — in Boston. A peach, from the picture he carried with him. He was crazy about her, and she must have been about him from the way she wrote. Bucked him up all the time. Regular sport. He was mad to get back. They were going to be married. Had a little place picked out in some suburb. Hingham, I think it was; yes, Hingham. He used to

laugh at the name and tell me how its beauty belied it. Poor Elliott."

For a moment he could not go on.

"She used to send him candy and smokes and the dandiest sweaters, big warm, cozy fellows; and socks by the ream. She was some knitter."

The parasol had ceased its wild motions. Caroline sat straight and silent.

"He used to tell me how capable she was — nights out in the trenches while we waited for a Boche — Pardon me; I promised never to hurt you with those details."

"Go on, please." The words were so low he could scarcely hear them.

"It seems she was just the plain domestic type; a home-maker. She hadn't any talents."

There was a deathly silence.

"And — and he didn't get back? "

"He's asleep over there — in Flanders. Queer, isn't it? — and I — I'm here —— "

"Jim! "

"Here — and you don't need me — want me."

He rose wearily and looked about for Pinto. "You walked? " he asked. "Well — Pinto must have known. He's gone home."

She picked up her hat where it had fallen on

the ground, carrying it in her hand as she fell into step beside him.

There was scarcely a word spoken on the long tramp home. In town she found her car and asked him to ride with her.

“Not to-night,” he said, almost brusquely, “Some other time.”

“You will come to see me?”

“If you wish.”

“If I wish!”

“It really can’t matter much, Gypsy.”

She could see that hope in him was dead. Lines that she had not noticed in his face before came out and mocked at her. There were shadows beneath his eyes. He seemed tired — lifeless. She wondered if his mother would notice, and hate her for it. She had always loved Mrs. Ludlow.

They parted in front of his office. She looked back after he had put her in the car and watched him climb the stairs that led to the rooms above. For the first time since she had known him his shoulders drooped. A sob caught her throat. She threw in the clutch and the car plunged forward.

Jim was home; Jim, her old loving Jim. He had asked bread of her — and she had given him a stone.

It was late when she opened the Abbey door. The family had long since retired. She heard her mother's voice as she passed her room.

“ Why are you so late, darling? ”

“ I was driving, Mother; good night.”

She paused at her own door, dreading the next question. But it did not come, so she entered quickly, slipping the bolt behind her.

CHAPTER IV

ADJUSTMENTS

A WEEK went by. Once Caroline passed Jim in the little wooded lane that ran toward his mother's cottage. He stopped and parted the trees that intruded their branches into the pathway. He was still in uniform, tall and upstanding, every inch a soldier Caroline thought, as she glanced up at him.

"Getting fit and rested?" she asked, stopping in the path, and he turned and walked beside her.

It was Sunday afternoon and she knew that he was free, yet he hastened his steps.

"Yes; back in harness again." He had a sheaf of paper under his arm, a formidable-looking bundle.

"You are not working to-day?"

"All days are the same to me."

"Couldn't you leave those papers at home and come for a walk? We might get to the Falls if we hurried."

It was a favorite haunt. His eyes hungered for it.

“ I haven't been up yet,” he said. “ I suppose the cañon hasn't changed any? ”

“ Not to speak of. I reckon nothing will ever change old Cheyenne but an earthquake. Will you come? ”

They had gone halfway before the conversation became easy and general. Caroline, the more adaptable, was blithe and gay.

Now and then, from the corner of his eye, Jim watched her. She was beautiful beyond his dreams; slender, graceful, with the languorous charm of the South in form and speech. As of old, her musical voice fell caressingly upon his ears. Her prettily drawled “ Mothah ” and “ Sistah ” still entranced him.

Sometimes she looked up at him with luminous hazel eyes. When she became animated the dark spots in the iris grew and spread (Mayre always called those spots coffee grounds), giving them an appealing softness.

“ You haven't given me Madame's messages yet,” she reminded.

Years before, when Caroline was just verging into girlhood, Madame Wakefield, an English

woman of large means, had taken a house opposite the old red one that headed the avenue. With her came her nephew, as secretary and companion in her travels. Madame remained in the house for two years.

Although she was very friendly with all the family, Caroline was her especial favorite. They spent many happy hours together and had kept up a rather desultory correspondence since her return to England.

Caroline could never quite account for the friendship, there was such disparity in their ages, except that there was something in Madame Wakefield's habits and disposition that corresponded to those of her own family. One might almost have thought her a Southern woman.

"I always feel so close to her," Caroline went on, finding a seat near the Falls, and Jimmy dropped down beside her. "As if I had known her before — somewhere on another planet," she ended, with a laugh. "I think old Maumy felt the same way. She used to make such a fuss when Madame came to see us, getting into her best bib and tucker and spreading the finest china. I always meant to ask her whom Madame reminded her of, but I never seemed to do it. Maumy's old

eyes could pierce eternity; or at least I used to think so, when I raided her cooky jar. She couldn't count to a hundred, Maumy couldn't, but she knew if a single cooky escaped."

"Where is Maumy now?"

Caroline's eyes grew tender.

"Poor old dear," she said softly; "she's gone home, back to Virginia. She wore out taking care of all of us. But she loved it. We were *her* children."

"Maumy was a great institution. I remember those cookies, too, and the muffins she used to serve on the veranda with afternoon tea."

"Maumy adored you. She used to say to me, 'Now don't you get too pertinacious with Mr. Jimmy, Miss Car'line — you ain't gwine find his like ——'"

She stopped suddenly. In her enthusiasm for Maumy's loyalty she had stumbled on dangerous ground. Jimmy was silent. He evidently had no intention of referring to the talk on the Mesa.

The conversation reverted to Madame. Jim had found her sadly changed.

"Remember how stout she used to be?" he asked. "We were quite shocked to find her little, old, and almost wizened."

“ Oh, I am so sorry! I suppose her lovely, red-apple cheeks were faded, too.”

“ Quite. I fancy the death of her nephew was a great shock.”

Caroline felt that the visit had been far from satisfactory as they wandered home in the early dusk. Jim had been unusually dull. He seemed very tired and often depressed. She remembered that Biddy had looked and acted much the same when he returned from overseas, but that thought did not comfort her. She was responsible for the dark shadows that lay beneath Jim's clear gray eyes, for their changed expression. The thought tortured her. If she had only been less honest; deferred her news that day on the hilltop until he had rejoiced a little in his homecoming. But she could never dissemble, never hold back anything. The truth always jumped from her; her opinions were always on the tip of her tongue; always leading her into deep water.

“ If being temperamental gives one the ability to do things — write or act or sing — then I think nature takes an awful toll,” she said once to her father when she had been particularly trying. “ There's something in me at times that commands me — makes me say and do things I never in the

least intended saying or doing. All those devilish little tricks I used to have when I was a child — they didn't really come from me — they were that other person in me."

That other person in her was openly rebellious now as she walked beside Jim, looking up at the stars, stumbling a little, her head held high. They stopped at the gate of the Abbey.

"Of course you are coming in for tea," she said, her eyes pleading a little. "We can't give you Maumy's muffins and coffee, but I have a pretty good imitation."

"Not to-night, thank you," he answered, pulling hidden papers from his pocket. "These briefs will keep me busy until midnight."

"Then you need coffee. And you really haven't been a bit nice to Major and Mother."

"I can't talk to people just yet, Caroline; please don't ask me. Your father will understand, I am sure."

Biddy had said the same thing. He was so desperately afraid people would ask harrowing questions, bring up things that he wanted to forget.

"All right, I won't insist. But you will come soon? I shall be leaving early in September."

She thought, although it was almost too dark for her to see, that his expression changed at the news, but he said calmly:

“ You have set the day, then? ”

“ Yes; about the first week in September, or thereabouts. We want to get well settled before the holidays. There will be a market then for Mayre’s pictures.”

“ And your plays? ” He was politely interested.

“ Oh, my plays are germinating here.” She laid her hand on her dark hair. “ In my head. Plays are funny things; they come from the outside — then work out again after they have sprouted, so to speak.”

It was late that same evening when she took her little gray correspondence case in by the living-room fire (the family had retired) and sitting down on the hearth rug with her writing materials in her lap, penned this note to Biddy:

I have been thinking a great deal about you for the past week, and all that our friendship has meant to me, but I fear it must be just friendship — nothing more. I shall never forget the good times that we have had together on our beloved campus, and elsewhere; our old haunts and drives with Emma; my visit to your lovely home. But Biddy, it must end there. I am not ready to

think of marriage. I am going East shortly to pursue the career fate mapped out for me almost before I could speak. I could never be happy in any environment that would lessen my interest in work; my especial kind of work, and I am sending this note as a sort of good-by. I hope that you will not altogether forget me, and that sometime I shall see you again, if only to talk over those old days so dear to both of us. I hope that I have not hurt you too deeply. I have tried to be fair from the beginning.

When she had sealed the letter and dropped it in the mail box on the veranda for the morrow's post, she went directly to bed — and to sleep — feeling that at last she had burned her bridges behind her.

She found a week later that she had not. Biddy's letter, answered by return mail, showed a dauntless spirit. Among other things he said:

I am quite willing to wait and see how this career works out. I have heard of them before. Sometimes they are not just what they promise. Don't think for a minute that any little old writing job can compete with my love and the protection I can give you. I shall write to you regularly and expect at least an occasional letter — you were always polite, Caroline, so you could not refuse to reward my constancy. Furthermore, I shall be in New York during the winter, and we will have

time to discuss this question so near to my heart, *ad libitum*.

Caroline sighed as she folded the letter and returned it to its envelope, but there was a glow about her heart as she washed the morning dishes, swept the tiny kitchen floor and gave Bobby an extra leaf of crisp green lettuce.

Although she didn't wish to marry Biddy and she was confirmed in the belief that she never would, still she loved his sunny optimism, his unswerving loyalty. Who would not?

CHAPTER V

CAROLINE PLANS A PARTY

DON'T you really think," Caroline said to Mayre one September morning, as they were putting the living room in order, "that we ought to have a party before we leave for the East? A real old-fashioned one; all the high school crowd; Ned Adams and Scotty Randolph ——"

"Punny Matthews too, perhaps!" Mayre's mouth dimpled in a smile.

"Yes, even good old Pun — if he would come. I offended him so outrageously that time I put on mourning to receive him." A laugh finished the sentence.

"That was a shabby trick, Caroline. Mother never quite forgave you; it wasn't in keeping with your Kirtley inheritance."

"Maybe not, but the boys said — heaven only knows how they heard about it — that it knocked the pun out of Punny. He's been as meek as

Moses ever since. Scarely speaks to me, however. You would have to do the asking."

"I don't mind. Of whom else had you thought?"

"Oh, most of the old class. It would be such fun to pop corn and make molasses candy and sing 'The Gang's All Here!'"

"Candy is so sticky; it gets over everything. And now that we have no maid——"

"That's so. Well, we could dance — and play charades and hang Japanese lanterns all over the veranda and garden. We must be sure to ask Herman Holt and Fred Everstron."

"Oh, Caroline! They wouldn't fit at all!"

"Fit? What do you mean?"

"Why, they don't go in the same set with Ned and Scotty. Can't you see Muriel Roach snubbing them?"

"Muriel Roach! Who's she? A kleptomaniac——"

"Caroline!"

"Which I have always thought was a polite title for a thief——"

"My dear!" Mayre's sensitive face was a study. "How can you say such things!"

"It's perfectly true. She took a handkerchief

of mine once — at that party Alison had, the time I broke my nose. Stuffed it in her blouse as nonchalantly as if it were being presented to her. I watched her from the hall above.”

“ Perhaps she thought it belonged to her.”

“ I thought that too — until she began taking pencils and erasers from my desk at school, and writing her name in the books I lent her. You remember the locker episode at High. It was hushed, of course. The Roaches are rich.”

Caroline opened the French door that led to the veranda, gave her dust cloth a shake and turned with a frown.

“ It makes me so angry,” she announced. “ Money is just a varnish — like we used to put on the stairs at home. Didn’t quite cover up the yellow underneath. It always cropped out; especially if we were entertaining.”

“ Perhaps then we had best not have Muriel.”

“ Of course we’ll have her. We’ll have everybody! ”

“ But you don’t like her. You’re saying such dreadful things about her.”

Caroline sat down on the piano stool and looked at her sister sympathetically.

“ I’m talking to you, Mayre, not to the public.

‘In de bos’m of my fambly,’ as Maumy used to say. I have found since I have been at college that you can’t judge people altogether by their faults. You’ve got to hang their virtues up alongside and strike a balance. You must be fair. You can’t condemn Fred Everstron for being deaf and dumb, Hans Holt for poverty, and condone Muriel’s snobbishness. Her shortcomings must go in the discard, too — even as yours and mine.”

“You are the queerest girl I ever saw, Caroline. I can’t understand you sometimes. You are veering right around.”

“Do you remember the time that Hope went,” Caroline asked, “that awful week — and Muriel — how dear she was? Hope wouldn’t taste anybody’s soup but hers. And those perfect custards — and the doll she brought — it was the last thing Hope ever played with. That was the fine side, don’t you see — can’t you understand? That’s why we must ask her and forget the other. Of course you think I’m inconsistent. I am; everybody is, more or less.”

An hour later Caroline was swinging along the country road on her way to visit her old college chum, Betty Carew, who had married Stanley

Warren, a young physician, and settled within a ten minutes' walk of the Abbey.

Her mind was busy as she walked, but not too occupied to enjoy the rustle of the leaves cast by the cottonwoods beneath her feet. The list of guests was tucked in her sweater pocket. Now and then she brought it out, and using a silver pencil attached to a chain about her neck, added a new name.

"Mickey Ferren," she said aloud. "Goodness, I wouldn't have forgotten him for worlds! Mickey taught me to swim. Haven't seen him for ages. How he used to duck me; but I got the stroke, thank you, Mick — Australian crawl and all. And Sam Hunt. Mercy!" A high-school party without Sam was like a dinner without dessert. Sam always furnished the stunts. She must call him up and tell him to come prepared.

There was Kathleen Briggs, too, her erstwhile companion. How could she have forgotten her! Kathleen was married now, living up on the avenue near the old red house, quite fine in her shingled cottage, her family's wedding gift. But no doubt she would come and bring her youthful red-headed husband who blushed like a rose when any one spoke to him.

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And there was Herman Holt, the awkward, green German boy who always kept back of the crowd (so Caroline thought) to hide the bold patches on his trousers. Herman Holt, the most talented boy in the class, whose sketches came to life as you looked at them. Several had found the way to Caroline's memory book; one of herself just after Mickey Ferren had ducked her. It was a clever caricature: Caroline exuding water. It trickled from her cap, her face, her shoulders; it ran in rivulets from her bathing skirt; but funniest of all was her expression, frightened and appealing. It made her laugh now to think of it. She wondered how Herman was getting on. It would be fun to take him out in the garden away from the others at the party and hear all about his work. Some day Herman would bring that old Junior class, stupid and critical, into the lime-light. People would be saying, "He got his first training at Old High at the Springs. Royle always said he was a genius — the class ought to honor him in some way." It was always so. Life had a queer way of cutting corners, taking a crooked path to fame. Some day Herman's patches would be spoken of lovingly. The boys who shunned him would say proudly, "Little old Herman Holt!

Always was a nice chap. We were great pals back at old High! Must look him up and talk over the old days, when I take that little trip across the pond! They say he's exhibiting in Paris, now."

She walked a little farther and came to a sudden stop. She had forgotten Neal Perkins. How inexcusably stupid! Neal had taken her to the High dances all during her Junior year. Made her the envy of half the girls in the class. And his wife: little Kitty Tempest whose admiration had outrun her judgment. The town still talked of that runaway match; of poor Neal's career nipped in the bud by Kitty's wiles and smiles. Hadn't she heard somewhere that Neal was going on with his law up at the college; that his father had forgiven his mad escapade and was saving a berth in his own office against the day of graduation?

She was smiling as she turned in at Betty's attractive stone gate and looked up at the rather pretentious red brick house just beginning to shelter German ivy and creeping roses. Betty had made her girlhood threat good: "If ever I have a home, it will be large enough to house all my friends — and then some."

Betty was in the sun parlor giving Stanley

junior his morning scrub. She had wheeled the tea wagon in from the dining room and the tub, fragrant and foamy with suds, was perched upon it. Caroline, as much at home in the house as Betty herself, paused in the doorway and laughed.

“That’s a new idea in serving, Betty. I take my hat off to your originality.”

Betty turned from Stanley’s pink ears and, dropping the sponge in the water, blew a soapy kiss in her friend’s direction.

“Thanks,” she answered, fishing for the soap and attacking her son’s sturdy back. “I said to Stan this morning that I never dreamed when I bought this cart that I’d be serving baths de luxe instead of tea. You never know what you’re coming to, Cal dear. Sonny, throw a kiss to your godmother. Tell her that I don’t always bathe you in the parlor — or next door, but you splash so. Isn’t he wonderful, Cal? He adores this sunlight.”

Caroline, going around to the other side of the tub, picked up a soft wash cloth and applied it to Stanley’s chubby hands.

“He is adorable. And so strong and well.”

“Humph! Look who his father is,” Betty reminded proudly. “Wouldn’t you expect the best

baby specialist in America to have a hundred per cent infant? Come here, you young rascal! I haven't time to laugh at your antics. I'm going to dry you and turn you over to Carry this instant. Your Aunty Cal has something on her mind. I know the symptoms."

"Oh, please don't send him off. I haven't seen him for two whole days."

Betty looked at her small jeweled wrist watch. "'Fraid he's got to nap, dear. Sorry, but you know his terrible, autocratic father. If I should run ten minutes over feeding time he would know. Don't marry a doctor, Cal. Not if you expect to rear a family. You get to be a regular old machine that sterilizes bottles and measures food and sleep and ——"

"You look badgered, Betty. I am so sorry for you."

Betty bundled the infant in a pink blanket and handed him over to the nurse. "Watch him, please, Carry, until he has taken all his milk. Doctor Warren is so afraid of his choking ——"

"To say nothing of his mother ——"

"Oh, his mother simply follows directions. Bye-bye, precious. Be nice with Carry, won't you? "

The child went off without a murmur, his sunny face peeking mischievously from beneath the folds of the soft coverlet.

“ Did I tell you, Cal, he has a tooth? ” Betty said, pulling up a chair. “ Mind sitting here? Hannah will clear away in a few minutes. Yes; the darlingest little pearl — upstairs.”

Caroline seemed a bit bewildered.

“ Upstairs? ” she repeated.

“ Upper jaw; really quite unusual, so Stan says. They nearly always come below first. But Junior is going to be original. We saw it from the moment he came. For instance, he never sucks the thumb on his right hand — it’s always his left; and when he cries, half the time he never sheds a tear — just screws up his little face as if he were making a mighty effort to be brave. Why, the other day we found that a pin had been sticking him for hours and all he did was to squirm a little, and when we found it, I was so frightened that I sent for Stan immediately, though he was terribly busy; but he was glad, because he wanted to sterilize the place or antisepticize it, whatever you call it. Stan says I haven’t a bit of sense about such things, but I always say, ‘ What’s the use of having a doctor for a husband if you can’t

use his brains? ' Heaven knows there are few enough compensations; telephone ringing half the night; hospital calls, finical women — my dear, the silly women! I spend half my time trying to locate Stan for them because their babies have broken out in a rash, or swallowed a pin, or some other simple thing."

The smile that had been lighting Caroline's amused face broke in a laugh.

"What *are* you laughing at? "

"Nothing."

"You always were cryptic, Cal dear. Forgive my saying so. So highbrow. The girls in the flat-iron room loved you to death but they stood in awe of you; especially after you put the play over that time. My, but you are clever. Still going East, careering, I suppose."

"Yes, we leave in ten days."

"My dear, I shall miss you so."

"Shall you? "

"You know it. By the way, I had a letter this morning from Susan Stirling. I'll run upstairs and get it. I want to take a peek at Junior, anyway."

Caroline settled back in the cozy steamer chair with its soft cushions, her arms under her head.

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When Betty returned she found her dreaming, with a smile still on her lips.

Betty drew up a deep wicker. "Listen to this," she said. "It's our same old Susan."

"Boston, August 30 — 19 —

"Dearest Betty:

"I've been wanting to write to you ever since you sent me the snapshots of your adorable son, certainly a wonderful specimen —

They both laughed and Caroline exclaimed,

"Specimen! Isn't that Susan to the life? Remember those jars she used to have at college, on the window sills, marked one, two and three; specimens of toads, reptiles, worms? *Specimens!* Don't I know? Didn't I room with her for nearly a year!"

"You did, poor child. But listen to this:

"Can't see that he resembles you in the least, must get his pudgy underpinnings from his illustrious father.' (I suppose she means his precious fat legs, though heaven knows Stan is as lanky as they make 'em.) 'I've never had the pleasure of meeting him, but from your ravings at college' (even in your sleep, Cal Ravenel used to say) — 'he must be Exhibit A. By the way, when you see Caroline, as I suppose you do often, do give her my best. I always liked her, though she was

awfully fussy about her room that semester we were together; but I haven't forgotten how nice she was to Dicky and those prize toads Ratherbourne and I were mad about. Remember them? Horned, you know, of the ' (get this if you can, Cal) 'insectivorous lizard variety, constituting the genius Phrynosoma ——' "

" That will be all right with me, Betty, dear; read on, please — any news? "

Betty skipped a few paragraphs and continued:

" " I have been working here in Boston ever since I left California and enjoying my instructors except for one thing, I don't mind telling you; Dad and I can't get on together any better than we ever did, and I am thinking of going to New York for the winter to take up work at Columbia. There's only one drawback ——' "

Caroline and Betty again broke into laughter.

" Yes; it's coming, Cal, it wouldn't be Susan without.' "

" " I haven't the money. I was wondering if it would be asking too much of you to finance me. I know that you have your own private income, and I am quite sure that when I finish, I shall be able to get a position and pay you back — every cent.' "

“Of course you sent a check immediately.”

Betty smiled as she looked up from the letter.

“Of course. Did any one ever refuse Susan anything? She’s so deadly in earnest, and such a credit to us. Stan thought I ought to. Isn’t he a dear, Caroline? You don’t know, I just can’t tell you, what he means to me. When I think of those long years without father and mother ——” She drew a trembling sigh; her blue eyes filled and overflowed.

“I know I’m perfectly silly, but I don’t care, Caroline, I want to ask you something. You don’t mind, do you? Aren’t you going to marry Jimmy? Can’t you make up your mind? I used to be so afraid at Cal (the university was always Cal to them) that it might be Biddy. Biddy’s a dear, no denying that, but ——”

She stopped, afraid that she had ventured too far. Caroline’s most intimate friends never intruded.

Caroline rose, reached for her Milan hat with its crown of yellow poppies, and put it on her head.

“I’m afraid it isn’t going to be anybody, Betty. There’s my work, you know ——”

“Pooh, work! Could any work take the place

of a husband and a bunch of sweetness like that upstairs? Please forgive me; I don't want to intrude, but I am afraid you are making a mistake. Men like Jimmy Ludlow — well, Stan's simply crazy about him. Says he will be a Supreme judge or something. Take my advice, Caroline. Don't be silly. As your old Maumy used to say, 'Men is men!' He'll be stepping off. There are so many charming girls coming along. A regular garden of them — and — you are going on twenty-three ——”

“ A terrible age! ”

“ Old enough to settle down. Must you really go? I hoped you would stay to lunch and help me select some cretonnes for my guest room.”

Caroline adjusted her hat before the antique mirror in the hall and turned quietly.

“ I think not to-day, Betty. I almost forgot my errand. Mayre and I are giving a party Friday night — Stan's old crowd. Of course you will come? ”

“ If we can, surely. Never can tell about Stan. If some of his finical women ——”

Caroline warded off the lingo with a kiss.

“ Do try, there's a dear,” she said, and was off. But as she trudged back through the yellow

leaves, clearing a path just to hear them rustle, Betty's words came back with added force. Was she making a mistake? Was marriage the ultimate aim of every girl?

Instead of turning in at her own gate, she took the tangled path that led to the cañon. She wanted space, a place to breathe and to think.

CHAPTER VI

OLD FRIENDS

EVEN Doctor Ravenel, quiet and dignified, took a decided interest in Caroline's party. Perhaps the fact that Caroline was giving it (Caroline, as every one knew, was the apple of his eye) lent interest. He came home the day before the event with several dozens of Chinese lanterns; ordered new garden chairs, and rather insisted upon canvassing the tennis court for dancing.

“Major! That would be such an expense, and it may turn quite cold,” Caroline protested. But in the end he had his way.

Martha came early Friday morning, eager and alert. She hurried about the kitchen, giving good-natured orders while she cleared the table for baking, buttered cake tins, and measured flour.

“How many these here hermits you all think I got to make?” she inquired of Caroline.

“ Oceans! ” came the flutelike answer from the drawing-room. “ You know boys, Martha! ”

“ But I’s gwine make cakes, too.”

“ Surely, heaps of them! ”

“ And sandwiches! ”

“ Loads! I will help you in a minute, and Mrs. Ludlow is coming over.”

To Caroline’s delight there had been no change in Mrs. Ludlow’s attitude. She was the same kind, loyal friend, but sometimes a hungry look crept into her eyes when she glanced at Caroline, and once she had ventured to say:

“ We all hope, dear, talented as you are, that you are going to get this career bee out of your bonnet and come back to us before long. We need you here.”

The morning took wings. Caroline darted from the kitchen to the veranda where Mayre, perched high on a stepladder, was hanging lanterns; from the veranda to the tennis court; to the telephone for messages, to the front and the back doors.

“ I feel as if my head were like Bobby’s, on ball bearings,” she declared, laughing as she fled from one thing to another, “ but it’s all such fun! ”

A ring at the front door made her turn hastily. A man held out a florist’s box.

“Mercy, what lugs!” Caroline exclaimed, noticing her name in legible print. “Who on earth has been so kind? Roses! American beauties, of all things! Oh, how kind!”

She opened the tiny envelope tucked between the buds and hastily looked at the enclosed card. A warm flush dyed her cheeks.

“How thoughtful,” she breathed, almost below her breath — “and how very like him.”

“From Jimmy,” she said, almost running into her mother in the hall.

Caroline's spirits kept pace with the delicious odors that rose from Martha's baking; hospitality, handed down from legions of Southern ancestors, welled in her heart. She gave Martha's fat arm an ecstatic pat as she passed her (on her knees before the oven), to be rewarded by, “Don't you all get so rambunctious, Miss Caroline! You come mighty near makin' me upset this here layer cake!”

She slipped behind Mrs. Ludlow, sitting at the kitchen table, spreading wisps of ham between dainty slices of bread, and left a kiss on her dark hair.

“Excuse me, but I am so happy!” she apolo-

gized. “ And you are so dear to help us this way! ”

Caroline, to be truthful, had never become accustomed to seeing the once affluent and comfortable Mrs. Ludlow in a kitchen. When she had first known her (in her little girlhood) across from the old red house, there had been many servants. She would scarcely have dared in those days, under those circumstances, to steal a kiss, but there was something about the intimacy of the clean, sweet-smelling kitchen, the spotless white apron covering her old friend from tip to toe, that invited caresses — gave one a homey, privileged feeling.

“ Now, what can I do to be saved! ” she asked, sticking a teasing finger between the bars of Bobby’s gilded cage to see him sputter and ruffle. “ The lanterns are all hung, inside and out; the rooms are dusted, the veranda swept, the best dishes sorted; the fudge cooling —— ”

“ You might make me a cup of tea,” Mrs. Ludlow ventured, looking at old Mr. Time, who was about to declare the hour one. “ And we will have the buttered scraps of these sandwiches with it.”

“ Indeed, you will have whole ones — on the

dining-room table. I'll ask mother if we may use the pink luster cups and Grandmother Kirtley's strawberry teapot."

"No, no," Mrs. Ludlow protested, but Caroline had darted off. The next moment there was a rattle at the rosewood cabinet in the dining room and Martha was filling the shining kettle on the stove.

Mayre selected a clean cloth from the sideboard drawer and Caroline arranged fresh flowers in the low bowl on the dining table. "Now, just a minute," she said, running down into the cellar for a pot of golden glow jam. "The party is on, this minute!"

Mrs. Ravenel came in from the yard, where she had been giving instructions to the men who were laying the canvas for dancing, looking as fresh and lovely as the late roses she held in her hand. Caroline put the tray with the frail cups that had weathered numerous generations, within her reach, and said in a subdued voice, "These are the times I always want to say grace; when we have you, Mrs. Ludlow — and the pink cups and the strawberry teapot! Do you mind?"

She bowed her head as naturally as if she were in the privacy of her own room and repeated the

words that the Major had taught her almost in infancy:

“ Make us grateful, dear Lord, for these, Thy mercies; bless our family life, our friendships — and let us never forget to be kind.”

“ Let us never forget to be kind! ” It was the simple doctrine upon which she had been reared, — a phrase so planted in the recesses of her soul that it had flowered in spirit and character.

“ Now,” said Mrs. Ludlow, when she had declined a fourth helping of real sandwiches and Martha’s invitations to cut the fresh cake, “ I must go home and let you all nap, so that you will be bright and interesting for this evening.”

“ Of course, you are coming to-night, you and Mr. Ludlow, with Jimmy? ”

Mrs. Ludlow took Caroline’s brown chin in the hollow of her cool hand and stooped to kiss either brown cheek. “ I shan’t promise, my child; old people are generally a nuisance at a frolic.”

“ A nuisance? ”

“ We shall see.”

Caroline watched her long after she left the wicket gate and took the crooked woodsy path

that led home. Then she turned with something very like a lump in her throat.

“I reckon,” she thought, “I am an ingrate, to — to give up a mother-in-law like that — when they are sometimes so trying.”

With one of her swift, characteristic movements, she turned and went back to work.

The Abbey was an alluring sight that evening as dusk settled down over the mountains and spread like a thickening mantle to the little garden. And later, when the lights began to twinkle through the gloom, lights that flickered and flared inside the colorful lanterns, it was a fairy place.

Caroline, a picture herself in a creamy gown, with one of Jimmy's red buds tucked in the low coil of her dark hair, coaxed her father out into the yard to get the full effect. “I want you to see how cleverly Mayre hung the lanterns in the pergola,” she said, “so that it looks like a Chinese temple. We only need some sweet-toned bells and a few pattering maids like Biddy Webster's mother has, to make it perfect.”

Presently they began to come, those boys and girls grown tall, — men and women now, busy with life's manifold affairs.

Caroline, with a graciousness that was an in-

heritance, stood with graceful, little Mayre in the drawing-room to receive them. The glow from a tall lamp beside her fell with soft becomingness on her beautiful hair, brushed until it gleamed like satin, deepening the shadows in her eyes, casting a bewitching spell about her. More than one young man paused a moment, lingering over her cordial greeting, drinking in the sheer loveliness of her.

“ This was dandy of you, Caroline! ” they said, as they passed on, or, “ You’re still a good sport, I’ll say! ” Or “ Who but you would ever have thought of getting the bunch together? ”

Before the evening was half over Caroline knew that the venture was a success. Even Muriel Roach had engaged Herman Holt in conversation, and Kathleen Briggs and her Titian-headed husband were making a desperate effort to entertain Fred Everstron. A jovial spirit pervaded the rooms. Even Grandfather Kirtley’s smile came to life in his portrait above the mantel. The red lips seemed almost to part in amusement.

Caroline scarcely knew how she managed it, but she found herself out in the pergola with Herman,—Herman, awkward and a little uncomfortable in his correctly pressed new clothes.

“ I want to know all about you, Herman. All you are doing — everything.”

Herman wondered afterward how he had dared to tell her — *everything*. His disappointments; his hopes and ambitions. But her eyes were so inviting, her interest so genuine. Before he realized it, he was speaking of his mother, respectfully but sadly, pouring out his very heart.

“ It's hard sometimes, Caroline,” he said and stopped, urged on again by her gentle “Yes.” “ Mother doesn't always understand. You see, she's from the old country; her ways are old-country ways. She can't understand my wanting to draw and paint. She doesn't know it's my very life and breath! She wants me to take a course in business; fusses if I make sketches or spend an afternoon in the mountains. Sometimes I wonder where I get it all, this terrible craving to do something — to make a name. I'd give ten years off the end of my life to have done one good thing, one! Old Cheyenne out there — with the sun on his back.”

“ Yes, Herman, I know, *I* understand ——”

“ Do you — do you really, Caroline? You don't think I'm a fool? ”

“ No, no, go on; go on, Herman. She will

understand later. She will be so proud some day."

She saw him again later. He was standing before the portrait of her grandfather, oblivious to surroundings. Sometimes he reached up and ran a caressing hand over the paint; traced the mouth and eyes with a halting finger; stood back, and then came closer. Caroline turned to hide a rush of tears.

And, although she flitted in and out among her guests, she managed to take a minute's rest on the veranda where Jimmy Ludlow sat with the Major. They rose at her entrance and smiled down upon her. She had never realized before that Jimmy towered well up beside her father; that there was something of the same courtliness in his manner. She saw his eyes wander to her hair — remembered the rose tucked there.

"Aren't you dancing?" she asked. "It isn't leap year, but if you will do me the honor ——" She bowed low before him.

It was the supper hour, and the tennis court was half deserted; over to the East, toward Austin's Bluff, the moon was rising. Stanley Warren, with the interest and privilege of an old friend, was extinguishing the candles in the lan-

terns; the moon's soft rays had put their flickering to shame.

“ How about it, old man, a moonlight dance? ” he said to Jimmy; and Jimmy called back, “ Fine, Stan, go to it! ”

They fell in step; the music stopped its jazzy shriek and took a sweeter cadence; Jimmy's hold tightened about her waist; her heart raced madly.

They were on their way to the twinkling pergola in the pines when Caroline came out of her dream and spoke.

“ Thank you, Jim; you dance as well as ever. I wish it might go on — forever! ”

“ It could, Caroline — if you only thought so.”

She shook her head.

“ You — you don't quite understand, Jimmy,” she said, and thought of poor Herman.

They were silent for some minutes after they sat down. Jimmy had picked up the end of her wide sash and was separating the fringe — putting the strands into little clusters — neat, methodical clusters. The precision made Caroline smile. Somehow those evenly separated strands reflected Jim's nature, his fairness, his honesty.

Suddenly he dropped the sash and looked up.

“ I wish you all success, Caroline — you know that.”

“ Of course, Jim.”

“ I want you to be happy — happy above all things. It doesn't matter about anything else.”

“ But you, Jim — your happiness? ”

“ It is of less importance.”

Her hand stole into his, almost childishly. His own tightened over it.

“ You will write to me — as you always have done — Jim? ”

“ Yes.”

“ You will think of me — often? ”

There was no answer, only his hand pressed harder.

They rose together.

“ I — I think I must go in now — Mayre will be needing me — Martha isn't very good at serving.”

“ Let me help you.”

“ If you will — please.”

She saw him again later, after they had finished serving. He was sitting with Stan and Betty, barely tasting the ice cream balanced on his knee, one of Mrs. Kirtley's elaborately monogrammed napkins spread beneath the plate. She thought he had never looked so handsome, bending to

catch Betty's prattle about Junior; his gray eyes clear and interested, — wistful. For years after, the expression remained with her.

She wanted to take her belated refreshments and sit beside him, but her guests were beginning to go. She moved on to the front door and stood there smiling, her hand outstretched.

“ Good-by, Caroline! ” one after another said, “ Don't forget us when you become famous down in ' lil old New York! ’ Remember your old pals! Come back to us. There's no place like home. You'll find that out! ”

She listened to the last footfall, calling her farewells, catching the jokes and laughter that fell on the crisp night air; waving to this one, blowing kisses to the girls as they drew their pretty evening wraps about them.

Stan and Betty were the last to move.

“ Better call this play-writing stuff off and stay with us, Caroline,” Stan said, with his ingratiating smile. “ Isn't Colorado good enough for you? Wait until you get jammed in a subway or cross Broadway after a matinee; you'll want to hike for the Springs to clear your lungs. Want to bet? ”

She shook her head. "I'm afraid it's too late, Stan."

"Never too late to mend!"

He was off, down the path to the gate, his arm beneath Betty's elbow, her eyes glowing into his.

Caroline turned with a little catch at her heart. She lay awake that night long after the others slept, thinking over the day's happenings, the party, Jimmy. For a long time her thoughts dwelt upon Jimmy. How he towered above most men; not just in height; there was something else that set him up. Something indefinable, yet definite. How clean-cut he was — always splendidly groomed: the little half-moons in his finger nails — how perfect they were. Mannerisms came back to her: his quick walk, a little trick he had of straightening his cuffs, then twisting his arms until they slid up again under his coat; the way he held his head, sometimes a little to one side; his slow smile, his clear grave eyes.

Another hour passed; still she lay thinking. The moon rode farther west. It peeked in at her window, making golden checkers of the blocked quilt that old Maumy Rachel had pieced for her. Dear old Maumy Rachel. She would see her soon now, and Maumy would say, 'How's Mr. Jimmy,

Miss Caroline? You ain't gwine turn down a fine young feller like him, is you — not fer this play-actin' business. Lord a massy! Some folks don't know when they's well off — no, they don't."

Maybe that was true, but how was one to know? Was life one grand choice? Was it just a business of selecting? Why were people given talents if they weren't to use them? Look at Betty Warren — hadn't touched the piano since Junior came, probably never would again — and all that wasted energy, those hours and hours of practice. Yet, was it time wasted? Who was it said, "There shall never be one lost good?" Wasn't that precious infant worth more than music, anyway — wasn't —

She turned to the wall with a long trembling sigh, taking Maumy's quilt in a heap with her. What was the use of worrying? She had made her choice and that was the end of it.

She yawned once, twice, and determinedly pulled down a curtain in her brain, to shut out Jimmy Ludlow's alluring personality.

CHAPTER VII

GOOD-BY TO OLD SURROUNDINGS

DOCTOR RAVENEL had never been quite happy about the marriage of his second daughter, Alison. Alison was just younger than Leigh, and older than Mayre. He had always regretted that he had given his consent to her early marriage. Alison was barely twenty, and had known Tevis McElroy but a short time when she promised to become his wife; lured, her father feared, by his wealth rather than by his pleasing personality.

Not that the Doctor objected to Tevis; on the contrary he like him, and his sympathy, if sympathy were needed, was on his side. It was the great wealth that Alison had fallen into that worried him, far more than his family suspected. Caroline could have turned good fortune to account, making others happy as well as herself. Leigh would have been a very angel of mercy. Even Mayre, shy and artistic, with her modest,

shrinking nature, would have bloomed and expanded under favorable conditions, for Mayre was unselfish in the extreme. But Alison was different.

Sometimes in the long watches of the night (Doctor Ravenel had come to Colorado for his health, a lung affection, and always slept out of doors) he would lie awake under the stars and reproach himself for his own remissness in this alien child's upbringing. Perhaps if he had tried this, suggested that, supplemented something else, he might have eradicated the selfishness that was apparent, even in her childhood.

Sometimes he wondered by what strange freak of inheritance she had come by a sin, that, to him, was the deadliest of all sins: self-gratification. Not from her mother. Mrs. Ravenel would deny herself anything to aid friend or neighbor, though she was far from sociable. Not from splendid old Captain Kirtley, Mrs. Ravenel's father (who was a paragon of virtues) nor from his wife, beloved by her townspeople.

Nor in his own blood (faulty as some of his kin had been) could he trace this parent root of evil; and yet he felt, since Alison's general environment had been shared by her sisters, all of whom

were generous and kind, the seed of some stony-hearted, ease-loving, sybaritic ancestor had winged the intervening generations and settled in the blood of his still beloved child.

Still beloved, although she forgot him for months at a time; more beloved perhaps, because he felt so keen a responsibility for her character.

He had seen nothing of her since her marriage, five years past, although she was amply able to visit her family at any time. Her letters were always full of excuses. She was not well in a cold climate; in the summer, Tevis wanted to go abroad — somewhere near famous golf links; autumn brought social duties; spring a customary flight to Palm Beach.

A little over a week before Caroline's departure she came into her father's office one morning with an open letter in her hand.

"It's from Tevis, Major," she said, a puzzled look dawning in her eyes. "I don't know what to think about it. He has your letter saying Mayre and I will be in New York the eighteenth, and he insists that he is coming to Chicago to meet us, and carry us down South for a visit. There isn't a word from Alison — I don't know whether she wants us or not."

Doctor Ravenel drew Caroline into his private room and gently closed the door. He took Tevis' letter and read it slowly. When he had finished, he folded the pages together and put them neatly in the envelope. He did not speak.

"I would so much rather go straight to Leigh as we had planned," Caroline went on, "and let Blair settle us in New York. They live so near, only an hour out, you know — and — and — oh, Major, what's the use bluffing ourselves any longer? Alison doesn't care a rap about us any more. She's the rich Mrs. Tevis McElroy, and we're just poor relations out west!"

Doctor Ravenel's stern, thin hand raised quietly.

"You are speaking of your sister, Caroline."

The spark in his own eyes caught Caroline's and blazed for a minute.

"Nevertheless I don't have to visit her."

"Not if I request it?"

"But you won't, Major; I don't want to go. Alison is so weaned away now; she has so many interests."

The Major had swung his office chair half away from her and for a moment sat toying with a paper weight on his desk; a round glass weight

that reflected from its crystal depths a baby picture of Caroline. It had long lain there. Leigh had given it to him one Christmas when Caroline was a cunning, mischievous little witch, half-demon with her snapping saucer eyes and tangled curls.

Although he loved it, he looked at it now with unseeing eyes, pushing it from him, then drawing it closer, sighing as he finally stowed it away in one of the cubbyholes above the stained blotter. He was thinking. Caroline hesitated to interrupt the thoughts that were formulating in his brain. He would speak presently. She had learned to wait upon his moods.

“Let us be frank, Caroline,” he said at last, “but let us not discuss Alison in anger. I think, since you are going East, you should visit her, for a week at least. Your mother grieves for direct word from her. Letters are always more or less unsatisfactory — except yours; your gift at writing helps there. Perhaps you may be able to tell us more than we have gleaned from cursory notes.”

“If I go, you wish me to write frankly, Major?”

“When you write to me — here at my office.”

Caroline understood. If she found things unpleasant, she must spare her mother. It was a sacred rule, held in the highest obedience by the family.

“ And you really wish us to go? ”

“ It would make me very happy, Caroline.”

“ Then of course that settles it. You will write Tevis? ”

“ Yes.”

She gave him the letter which he had handed back to her, and lovingly throwing her arm over his shoulder, left a kiss on his fast whitening hair. He turned, and putting an arm about her, held her close.

“ You will miss us so, Major, perhaps we shouldn't leave you,” she said.

For a moment he laid his head against her strong young arm. It was a caress that surprised Caroline. For so many years she had leaned on him; now, that sudden move had for an instant put her in his place. She was his strength.

She turned so that he could not see the tears that blinded her and then with a laugh that was more than half-sob, made a remark about his hair (still luxuriant) defying his years. It wasn't at all what she wanted to say; she wanted to keep the

years out of the conversation, but they persisted so in her mind.

He straightened, feeling, rather than seeing, her mood, and patted her affectionately.

But she did not forget the incident. It went with her on her journey, and others kept it company: Jimmy's hasty good-by.

He had run in on his way to the office that last morning with his customary box of chocolates and the latest magazines, hurrying on as if business were the one thing in all the world that mattered.

And there was the last day at home; the desolation of the Abbey after the trunks were packed and strapped and the luggage gathered in the hall. Mrs. Ravenel had busied herself up to the last moment with little details attendant upon a journey. "Had the girls forgotten anything; toothbrushes; cold cream for the sooty train smoke — Mayre's camera?"

Caroline understood those eager solicitations. They took her mother away on quiet trips to the bedrooms; deferred dreaded last minutes.

But the other, perhaps the most poignant memory of all, was the last, the view from the train window. Farewells had been said, affectionate

kisses given, and then they had gone away, her father and mother.

Mayre began to arrange the luggage to hide her emotion, but Caroline's glance never wavered. She watched them as they climbed the hill to the spot where they had parked the car, those precious forms, her father a little behind, helping her mother tenderly.

A stiff wind had sprung up. It caught her mother's long skirts, baring her trim ankles and smart boots with their impossible heels. The tails of the Major's light summer overcoat flapped and twisted, wrapping about his thin limbs.

Was it because the wind blew so that they both stooped? Was it the exertion of climbing that made their steps seem weary? Surely her father was leaning more heavily than usual upon his stout walking stick.

Caroline could not decide, but the vision remained with her: those two forms buffeting the wind — climbing — plodding.

“But they have each other!” she said, as a turn in the road lost them to view, and, anyway, their burdens are lightened!

Perhaps, after all, they rather liked beginning over again. Only last night she had seen her

father draw his chair closer to her mother's with the pretense of a better light on his paper; and later, when she had gone back to the room for something she had forgotten, his hand had found hers. Perhaps he was only bracing her for the next day's ordeal, but anyway, Caroline loved the picture.

The seat opposite her own was vacant. She crossed over for a last lingering look at the Old Man in the west. He would not change, no matter how long she remained away; he would be there, solid as the ages.

She kept her eyes turned toward him until the early dusk fell like a robe about him.

CHAPTER VIII

ALISON

TEVIS had changed but little during the five years that had passed since Caroline had seen him. He was heavier, more mature, and, now and then, despite the fact that he was so comfortably situated in life, he had a dejected, world-weary look that ill became so young a man.

Caroline noticed it soon after they started southward. They had settled back in the compartment to enjoy an hour's visit.

"Now you must tell us all about Alison," was Caroline's first remark.

Was it possible; did Tevis shrug his shoulders ever so little as he flicked the ashes from his cigarette with a nervous finger, or did she fancy it? Caroline could never quite trust her impressions; they were so apt to be colored by her imagination.

"Alison?" he repeated, and an expression so swift and unexplainable passed over his countenance that Caroline could not fathom it. "Alison

is well. You will find her as beautiful as ever. Time neither adds nor takes from her."

"She has so little to worry her," Mayre remarked. "She has been so fortunate."

Tevis said nothing. He leaned back against the car cushion and closed his eyes, letting the conversation drift. But Caroline pursued the subject.

"She hasn't grown stouter, then? She writes so often about having to exercise to keep down the troublesome Kirtley flesh. Mother says that's on *her* side. The Ravenels are all slender."

Tevis' laugh jarred a little. Caroline was nettled.

"A few pounds can make a difference," she said — "in one's waistbands, anyway. Cousin Eliza is well? We shall see her, of course."

"Cousin Eliza's a peach; yes, she runs out often. Sometimes we have a little lark all our own — when she dines with me. Alison's away a lot; society and charity affairs; committees and what not. Last year when I managed to pick up the flu, Cousin Eliza came out and camped with me ——"

"Where was Alison?"

"Alison is afraid of diseases. I preferred that

she ran no risk; I rather insisted upon her going up to New York."

"But, good gracious, wouldn't she run into it there? It was everywhere!"

"She didn't! Abbie went along with disinfectants."

"She still has Abbie?"

Oh, yes, Abbie is an institution."

The conversation lapsed for a minute. There seemed nothing more to say. When Tevis went off to his own compartment, a little later, Mayre whispered:

"He doesn't seem very happy, does he? Oh, dear, I wish we hadn't come. Not if things are going to be unpleasant."

"They won't be," Caroline said cheerfully.

"But Alison's going away when Tevis was sick, like that, why ——"

Caroline opened her black traveling bag with a jerk.

"If things are unpleasant, we will move on," she said determinedly. "I think Major only wanted us to pay our respects."

It was rather early when the party arrived the next morning, but nevertheless Caroline looked

about the station for her sister's welcoming smile. It was missing.

Tevis led the way to a handsome limousine. A man in livery touched his hat respectfully. The bags were tucked in the tonneau; Caroline, with Tevis and Mayre, sank down on the luxurious, silver-gray cushion, and the door banged.

"I rather hoped Alison would be at the train," Mayre ventured. "I can scarcely wait to see her."

The expression, noticed the night before, crossed Tevis' face.

"Alison never rises early."

It took some time to reach the imposing residence set in its acre of ground at the outskirts of the city. When the car finally stopped under the porte-cochère, Caroline looked up radiantly.

"What a perfectly stunning place, Tevis!" she remarked. "And what wonderful grounds!"

The door opened, a pleasant-faced old darky with stubby white whiskers and a friendly smile, reached for the bags which the chauffeur had tossed on the hall settle. A colored maid in a black dress and spotless apron led the way upstairs. Tevis followed.

"The rose suite, isn't it, Sophy?" he inquired,

flinging open a door on the second landing. "See that the young ladies are made comfortable, and that breakfast is not kept waiting. We're all famished."

"They will have it here — in the rooms?" the girl asked.

"Oh, no; let us have it with you, Tevis," Caroline exclaimed, not wishing to make extra work.

"Surely!" He looked at his watch. "In ten minutes? Can you make it?"

They found him a little later, comfortable behind a bubbling coffee urn, his paper spread before him. Old Peter, the white-haired butler, hovered over him, pushing the urn closer, uncovering buttered toast.

"Mayn't I pour the coffee?" Caroline asked, noting the urn with its tray of delicate cups.

"Sure thing! Will you? Peter does it usually, but we'd a heap rather have a lady, eh, boy?"

The old man grinned as he pushed the service in Caroline's direction. Tevis put aside his paper and watched her slender hands.

"You wouldn't contract to do this every morning, would you?" he asked almost wistfully.

"Oh, I wouldn't want to take Alison's place."

Peter turned his back and fumbled with the dishes on the sideboard. The ghost of Tevis' sardonic smile flickered, then faded.

"Alison doesn't breakfast early," he said, with the utmost politeness.

"Then I should love it—one lump or two? Oh, yes, three, I remember, indiscreet man!"

Her laugh caught his, mingling gently.

"Scold on," he said; "I rather like it."

Even after they had finished the rich golden waffles that Peter pressed upon them, Tevis lingered.

"Suppose you want to unpack," he said, and finally pushed his chair from the table.

"Oh, we shall only be here a few days," Caroline answered, her face crimsoning.

"A few days! Come on now! Isn't that rather shabby when I went all the way to Chicago to bring you down here?"

Caroline rather thought it was, but she said nothing.

"Maybe you would like to look over the house a little," Tevis suggested, as they left the cosy breakfast room.

But Caroline had other plans. Barely had the door closed upon them in their bedroom when she

broke forth. "Unpack, indeed! With such a welcome from Alison. I would not remove the things from our traveling bags—not even to please the Major."

But she changed her mind a little later, for there was a tap at the door and Alison entered,—not with arms outstretched—that would have been too much to expect—but with a brilliant smile and a cordial, "Dear girls! How very nice to see you!"

Although she offered her cheek for a kiss, she turned it so far that Mayre's spontaneous caress reached the very tip of her ear—or would have, had it not been covered with its wealth of Kirtley hair. Caroline let her own greetings go at a handshake.

"And how you have grown—both of you! Caroline, how much you are like Father!"

She had stepped back now and was taking in their attractions minutely. Caroline read her thoughts in regard to Mayre, but she was scarcely self-conscious enough to accept the admiration that shown in Alison's eyes when she turned toward her.

And the girls were not slow to recognize Alison's finished beauty. She was dressed for

riding, in a soft tan coat that fell to her knees, where it met graceful breeches tightly buttoned into tan riding boots. Her beautiful hair was skilfully arranged under a brown derby, indescribably becoming. She carried a small riding crop with a burnished gold head, heavily monogrammed.

Yes; Tevis was right. Time had not touched her, except to add to her beauty. She was exquisite, only a little too perfect to be real, too artificial. Why was it she made Caroline think of a wax lily that old Maumy had carried to Colorado with her? Caroline had never touched it; Maumy always kept it under a glass globe, but sometimes, if she were good (all too seldom) Maumy permitted her to look at it, and always her little nostrils had widened expectantly, though Maumy invariably said, “ ’Taine got no smell, honey; it’s jes make-believe; han’made — but it’s perfec! ”

Even as a child she had rebelled at the deception. What good was it? What did its beauty amount to — handmade!

Her thoughts wandered back so far that she was quite oblivious to Alison’s questions. Her sister had seated herself on the very edge of a

Windsor chair, carefully parting the tails of her riding coat to avoid mussing them, and all the while she was inquiring, "How are darling Mamma and Father?" she was flicking imaginary lint or dust from her trousers, or examining the leather of her handsome boots.

"They are both well," Caroline answered, "and sent you a great deal of love."

She looked closely to see if Alison's face responded to the message, but Alison had discovered a flaw in the boot and instead of saying, "How I should love to see them," remarked, "Dealers are so unreliable these days. I really think these boots will have to go back to the shop. I am not at all satisfied with them."

And yet, absorbed as she appeared to be, Alison's quick eyes and brain were taking in the girls before her. Caroline's beauty amazed her. She could scarcely take her glance from those splendid golden eyes under their curved black brows; the straight nose, the red, mobile mouth. She must manage to keep Caroline for awhile, she thought, and present her to society; she would be a mild rage in the exclusive circle in which she herself had made so secure a place. And Mayre? Mayre was attractive, too, in her way, but she

would never be noticed with Caroline in the foreground. Where had Caroline got her poise? She was so sure of herself, so aristocratic in look and bearing.

A knock at the door interrupted conversation. Sophy entered.

“The trunks, Mrs. McElroy,” she said. “Where will the young ladies have them?”

Alison rose, giving directions.

“You will want to rest for awhile after your journey, I am sure, so you will excuse me until lunch time. I always ride in the morning. It is the one thing that keeps me fit. Please be comfortable; Sophy will unpack and put away your things. Of course, you are going to make us a nice long visit. I am so anxious to hear all about the West.”

She smiled an almost cordial smile and turned to go. At the door she paused. “If you want to, wander over the house and grounds. I think Tevis has planned a drive for the early afternoon. The city is very lovely now in autumn dress.”

Tevis had planned! Tevis!

Sophy, the maid, stood near the door, awaiting orders.

“We shall not need you,” Caroline said. “We

are accustomed to waiting upon ourselves. Thank you just the same." The girl backed out, much surprised.

At one o'clock Alison appeared again, and led the way to the dining room. Tevis was not present. Alison was in a pleasant mood and chatted affably. There was a glow about her from the exercise of riding, a glow that lent warmth to her cold, clear-cut features.

"You have seen the house?" she asked, when they had all but finished luncheon. They had not; they had been busy writing letters home and unpacking the things they would need for their short stay. It was Mayre who gave the information.

"Then I will show it to you."

Alison led the way to the large drawing-room that seemed to occupy the extreme left wing of the house. For all it was so large and so handsome, it presented (so Caroline thought) a dreary aspect.

A handsome rug covered the floor; not a colorful Oriental, but a one-toned carpet that caught the putty shade of the walls and faded into them. A grand piano stood at one end, closed. The ivory-toned mantel, with its ample grate and pol-

ished andirons, was empty. There was not a picture to be seen, — not an ornament, save two huge glass vases that reflected the color in the rug and in some lights showed a cold blue glaze.

A huge sofa, carrying out the same dull tones, stood before the fireplace. Caroline dropped down upon it and hastily scrambled to extricate herself from its luxurious depths.

Chairs were scattered about. Deep, overstuffed chairs, akin to the sofa. There were no shades at the windows; the heavy, putty colored curtains were drawn back, so that one caught a vista of ancient oaks and elms; of formal gardens still bright in the autumn sunshine. Mayre stood entranced before one of the windows.

“You have been so wise not to clutter the room with a lot of useless things — bric-à-brac, photographs and reproductions.”

Alison looked pleased. Caroline said nothing.

“Don’t you like it, Caroline?” Mayre asked.

Caroline’s topaz eyes took a sweeping glance.

“I prefer smaller houses — and personal things about,” she said honestly. “I appreciate that picture through the window — it is beautiful, and quite enough, perhaps, but ——” She stopped, not wishing to be rude.

“Pray go on,” Alison invited.

“To me, the room lacks individuality.”

But Caroline somewhat changed her opinion of the mansion later in the afternoon, when Alison's fashionable friends dropped in for tea, — especially of the drawing-room.

Peter had made a splendid fire and set one of the rare mahogany tables with sparkling silver and napery. A copper kettle, polished until it shone, steamed and sputtered on a tray with priceless china. The deep chairs were drawn closer; in little groups that made them seem more friendly. Sophy pattered about, relieving the elegantly gowned women of rich furs and wraps; pushing the tea cart with its delectable muffins and scones down the line of laughing, chatting guests.

The barren room, so cold and formal in the morning, now seemed a most fitting background for the women's colorful costumes. It lent itself admirably to entertainment. Peter's carefully selected logs flickered and flamed, crimsoning the walls and draperies, dancing over the teacups and silver.

Alison had discouraged the ride with Tevis, saying that she wanted the girls fresh and pretty for the tea hour. She had quite delicately hinted

that they must dress becomingly, not too much for afternoon, but something soft and becoming; semi-low at the neck.

Caroline selected an ivory-toned crêpe made in simple straight lines, held at the waist with a soft, dull yellow sash that, knotted, fell in graceful lines below the hem of the skirt. About her throat she had twisted a strand of amber beads that set off her dark hair and brought out the velvet spots in her eyes.

She was a picture as she stood with Mayre in the doorway, waiting for Alison to rise and introduce her.

For a moment, the buzzing conversation stopped. Women looked up with interest. The few men who were in the room rose.

“My sisters, the Misses Ravenel,” Alison murmured, taking Caroline’s hand and presenting her first. “They have come on for a little visit with us, before settling in New York for the winter.”

Some one wheeled chairs closer to the fire; Sophy pushed the cart within reaching distance. At the far end of the room a stout matron lifted her lorgnette and openly gazed at Caroline.

“My dear,” she said to a young man in a high-waisted, pinched-back suit and noticeably delicate

spats, "that's the most beautiful girl I have seen in moons. Alison's sister, did she say? Do they grow like that in the West? Who's the little one? Pretty too."

"Both Mrs. McElroy's sisters, I believe. Didn't they say the Misses Ravenel! She was a Ravenel, remember — the Ravenels of Virginia. Think she told me that her father had to go West; tuberculosis or some such beastly thing. Jove, she is handsome, isn't she? The taller one!"

Fleming DeCoursey adjusted his own glasses on his beaked nose and took another look. Caroline had settled down in one of the deep chairs. It enveloped her, so that only the crown of her dark hair, wreathed about her shapely head, remained to view. Mayre had drawn a stool close and sat laughing up into the face of a young girl who was passing cream and sugar. It was a habit of Alison's to allow whoever would to do the honors. The buzz resumed. Peter replenished the fire.

Caroline glanced about. Now and then she met a stare that changed to a friendly smile. For awhile she sat back, listening to the velvet tones of Alison's guests; she realized that she was in the South: soft, purring accents, rich and full,

fell pleasantly upon her ears. She understood for the first time what people meant when they spoke of her own softly rounded “r’s.”

“You are from Colorado, the land of peaks and polar bears?” a voice at her elbow remarked.

Caroline turned to receive a puff of smoke directly in her face.

“Oh, I beg your pardon — that was so careless; I hope I didn’t puff it right into your eyes — I didn’t realize that you would turn so quickly. Can’t I get you one — a cigarette?”

Caroline looked up into the face of a young girl, about her own age, a languorous creature who made no move to carry out her invitation.

“No — I don’t smoke, thank you.”

“No; really? You miss a lot. Don’t approve of the habit, perhaps?”

“I have really never thought anything about it,” Caroline answered frankly.

“Perhaps it isn’t being done so much in the West?”

“Not in Western colleges — at least not in mine.”

“Oh, you’re a college woman! How interesting! You will have to tell me all about it; that’s the way I have received most of my education —

vicariously, don't you know. Mamma always thought travel so much more essential. Of course, you have been abroad? "

" No. "

" Oh, my dear, you have so much to live for! Think of never having smoked or traveled! "

Caroline let the covered accusation go. The conversation was too trivial to demand defense. She was rather glad to see Tevis entering the doorway. He seemed to be looking for some one. Presently he spied her and came forward. The young woman had passed on to more cultured quarters and he took the forsaken seat.

" Well, " he said, taking a cup of tea from Peter's hand, " how are you coming along? Like this? " He nodded toward the guests.

" I am a little afraid I don't fit, Tevis. I haven't had this kind of social training. "

" Praise be! "

Caroline smiled faintly. Her glance followed Tevis's and lingered on Alison's flushed face. The several men who were in the room centered about her. They were all smoking, Alison included.

Caroline's glance wavered and fell. A russet hue stole into her own cheeks. She thought of

the Major. What would he say to Alison's cheap abandonment? And her mother? She wondered if Alison would have the temerity to bring her cigarettes into their presence.

Tevis finished his tea and took from his pocket a silver case. He passed it to Caroline before taking one of the neatly arranged cigarettes. She shook her head.

"Don't smoke?" he asked, a bit surprised.

"No."

"Why not? A question of principle?"

"Rather a question of taste, I should say."

Tevis smiled as he struck a light.

Alison came over to where they were sitting, bringing a beaked-nosed young man with her.

"Caroline," she said, "I want to present Mr. DeCoursey. I have been telling him that you aspire to writing plays. Femmy is a playwright himself. He's done some very clever things."

Tevis offered his seat. Mr. DeCoursey made his carefully creased trousers comfortable at the knees and sank into the gulf of cushioned springs. The conversation was interesting. Mr. DeCoursey did know the drama. He also knew something of its technique. Fifteen minutes of absorbing discussion passed. Then somebody suggested

dancing. A phonograph shrieked a fox trot. The women who were lucky enough to have partners moved toward the large reception hall.

DeCoursey rose. " May I have the pleasure? " he asked.

The next moment Caroline was following his footsteps through the variations of the modern dance.

CHAPTER IX

MAUMY RACHEL

ALTHOUGH Alison was very chary of companionship, Caroline had many opportunities to view and analyze her sister before the week's visit was over. There was always the half-hour in the morning before Alison started for her ride; sometimes a brief glimpse at luncheon, and a still better opportunity at tea, — a function Alison never missed either at home or abroad.

The atmosphere of the beautiful house — Caroline never thought of it as a home — chilled and appalled her. It was always so still. Servants went about noiselessly. They never sang at their work as old Maumy Rachel used always to do; indeed they seldom smiled. Sometimes old Peter ventured a friendly nod or a cheerful, “Good mornin’, Miss, good mornin’; ah hopes you all is well to-day.” To which Caroline replied with a smile that cheered his old heart, “Fine, Peter,

fine! I hope you are too." And he would patter down the wide hall, scratching his white kinky head, murmuring a grateful, "Thankee, Miss, Thankee."

The dinners were the hardest, particularly when the family dined alone. Almost always there was company,—the beaked-nosed young man in the pinched-back coat and the young person with the vicarious education. When they were present, the conversation raced. There were sparkling stories, *bon mots* which Caroline did not always catch; comment and laughter.

But when they were alone, the conversation was strained, unnatural. Tevis's face held a gloomy expression. Alison was frankly bored. Into the long silences she sometimes ejected, "I should have insisted upon Femmy's staying to dinner with us," or, "You girls must find us very stupid, Tevis and I. There is so little to say when one has been married five years." An apologetic laugh followed the announcement.

And yet the days were pleasant. Tevis saw to that. He had provided a riding horse for Caroline; a beautiful bay mare, one of the many Kentucky thoroughbreds that filled the McElroy stables. Abbie had provided a suitable habit,

very much like the one Alison wore, and Alison's blue eyes clouded when she saw her sister's slender form arrayed in it. The creamy coat and soft tan breeches accentuated her youth, her boyish figure, gave her a charm that Tevis was not long in remarking.

“ Jove, but you are stunning in that rig, child! ” he cried to Alison's evident discomfort, though she was thoroughbred enough to keep silent.

In the West, Caroline had not had many opportunities to ride horseback, but those old Virginia days when she had played circus on Calico's willing back stood her in good stead. She took her saddle well, light as thistledown on Countess' shimmering back.

Alison was an experienced horsewoman. She was at her best in the saddle and rather delighted in riding horses of spirit. The only disagreement that passed between her and Tevis in Caroline's presence was in regard to these indiscretions. Caroline never forgot the moment. It came back to her later with horrible force.

They were dressing for a dinner party and Caroline, not sure of how soon they were starting and wanting in the interim to write a hasty line to the Major, knocked softly on Alison's bedroom

door. She thought she heard a low "Come in," and pushed the door ajar.

Alison was standing in front of her long mirror, a radiant vision in a black velvet evening gown, so low that it showed every curve and dimple of her beautiful back and shoulders. Abbie was clasping a rope of pearls about her throat.

The sight of the pearls made Caroline catch her breath. From the time Alison had learned to talk, she had prated about a rope of pearls. When they were children, in Virginia, many years before, they had talked, as children will, of their hopes and ambitions. Caroline's was to own a circus. Mayre wanted to go abroad and study art, but Alison always said:

"When my ship comes in, I shall buy a rope of pearls." Or "When Great-aunt Caroline passes on to her reward, I hope she will leave me the family pearls."

Great-aunt Caroline was only a myth. She had passed out of the family life in her girlhood, but her memory was kept green by tales of her wealth.

And, strangely enough, Alison had received the pearls in the most mysterious way. It was on the day of her wedding. The presents were arriving when suddenly, without rhyme or reason,

certainly without warning, a messenger appeared with a package. Unwrapped, it displayed a worn velvet box in which reposed a string of exquisite pearls. There was no card — no clew. The messenger had hastened away before the family became aware of his presence. Inquiry proved of no avail. No one knew anything about the pearls. To this present moment their sudden appearance had never been accounted for.

Caroline realized before she had stepped into the room that she had stumbled upon a quarrel. Tevis's face was flushed, his voice unsteady. "Alison," he said, "I am asking you for the last time to give up Silver Heels. He is unsafe. Your groom tells me that recently you have had two very narrow escapes. I will not permit you to ride so fractious a brute any longer."

Alison turned with a scornful laugh.

"Oh, Jilson!" she remarked, holding her ivory hand mirror nearer, so that she could get the effect of her lovely hair in the glass opposite. "Jilson is a born coward. I shall dismiss him to-morrow. I will not have him coming to you with tales."

"I must reserve the right to hire or dismiss

the men in our employ," Tevis returned at white heat.

Alison's low, even tones were maddening. "But I can refuse to have Jilson attend me. Keep him by all means, and I will ride alone."

Tevis's face blanched. "I shall sell Silver Heels to-morrow. That is final," he said.

Alison turned with a sobered face. "If Silver Heels goes — I go also," she answered with a meaning glance.

Tevis went a step nearer. He tried to throw an arm about his wife, but she backed away with a frown.

"Tevis, please," she murmured, "let us not be dramatic. You are annoying me."

His coat sleeve had for the briefest moment touched her dazzling white back. She shrank away, lifting the mirror to see the damage he had done.

"Abbie," she said softly, "the powder — see — the left shoulder — *the left* I said, not the right — Mr. McElroy's sleeve left a mark."

Tevis turned, half-stumbling into his adjoining room. Caroline backed away from the door unobserved.

And yet there were times when Caroline won-

dered if Alison were not possessed of two separate and distinct natures. She had all the social graces, so camouflaged with kindness that often those nearest to her felt they had been unjust. She could enter a room with a smile so gracious that old and young rose to receive her cordial greeting. She was especially sweet to old people; to Tevis's mother and father, though Tevis's gray-eyed sister looked below the surface and pondered over what she found there. Often her effort to be civil to her beautiful sister-in-law was forced and unnatural.

And Caroline, too, found a cunning diplomacy hidden beneath beguiling amenities. Alison's smile had its degrees. For Tevis's mother and father, whose purse strings were ever open, it was of saccharine sweetness; for the elderly Misses Stanhope — autocrats of Southern aristocracy, whose hospitality was always at a premium — it was not less pleasing; but for the hangers-on in her limited world, the social climbers, it was merely courteous and well-bred.

To her father and mother Caroline wrote cheerful heartening letters. There was no need of upsetting their faith and happiness. She went into detail about the mansion Alison called home, of

the grounds, the servants, the beautiful drives and rides, the teas and dances.

For Caroline was young and enthusiastic enough to enjoy the social triumphs and although she took the young Southern swains' flattery with a grain of salt, she was human enough to enjoy it. She danced until the wee small hours of the morning; she lunched and dined with Alison's friends, Mayre going along when she could be persuaded. She rode, golfed, and walked with Tevis, wholly to Alison's indifference; and so the days slipped by pleasantly if not altogether profitably.

There was one never-to-be-forgotten week-end excursion. Tevis had planned that, naturally, since Tevis thought of all the kind things. It was a trip to Warrensburg, the old Kirtley home where Maumy Rachel was passing her declining days in peace and plenty.

They had started early in the morning in Alison's beautiful limousine, for the roads were good and the distance not too great for comfort. Alison had promised to join them, but at the last moment pleaded a headache, and Tevis's sister (to Caroline's secret delight) took her place in the party.

Caroline could never quite understand or de-

scribe the emotion that swept her as they entered the quaint old town, unchanged apparently, except for the new houses that had sprung up, the new factories and enterprises. Try as she would, she could not stem the rush of tears that came with the sight of the old home. There it stood, that old yellow house, brave in its new paint and mended galleries; there was the old triangular yard, the familiar woodpile, the neighboring hills with their sturdy rhododendrons; the crooked sunlit path that skirted off toward the McFees and wandered on to town.

Tevis had suggested dinner at the hotel, and then a visit to Maumy, but Caroline's loyal heart had quickened at the thought of her old nurse and she begged to be allowed to stop alone and join the party later.

It was just as well; Maumy was too feeble to entertain many visitors at a time. Voices confused her. Something in her old brain snapped when she demanded poise.

There was no difficulty in finding the cabin. It stood but a stone's throw from the great yellow house, keeping watch over it. A tiny place of one room, with a sagging porch to which a wistaria vine clung lovingly; with geraniums on the win-

dow sill, and a thin line of blue smoke winding upward from a broken chimney.

Caroline waited until the sound of the motor had died in the distance before she knocked at the battered door. There was a moment's silence and then a querulous, "Who all knockin' that-a-way? Come on in!"

Caroline entered quietly. The room, with its old, homemade chairs and tables, was in perfect order. In one corner stood a wide, comfortable bed covered with brilliant quilts, quilts riotous with flowers; clean, beautiful quilts that bore the marks of Maumy's own handiwork.

The old woman on the bed tried to rise but sank back with a groan, her startled eyes straining into the room questioningly.

Caroline went a step nearer, laughing softly. She was a tiny girl again as she approached that bed, a little Red Riding Hood with a basket of goodies under her cape. How those snapping old eyes peering above the gorgeous quilts had once frightened her! Time was when she had exclaimed in terror, "What big eyes you've got, Maumy!" and leaving the basket on a near-by chair, sped for the sagging porch and the path that led to the big house. But she was not afraid

to-day. Her own eyes were large with love and happiness.

“ Maumy,” she said, kneeling down and taking the wasted hand held out to her, “ Maumy, don’t you know me — Caroline — your little Miss No Account? I’ve come to see you, dear — from far-off Colorado.”

For a moment there was not a sound, save the ticking of Maumy’s clock on the dilapidated sideboard. Then the old head raised with a jerk, feebly, hopefully.

“ You ain’t jokin’, is you, honey? Maumy can’t see like she use’ ter. Lean closer, Missy, let me feel yer haid; they ain’t no mistakin’ Kirtley hair. Yes, *you is, you is* ma little lamb; my lil, good-fer-nothin’ baby! ”

She was half-crooning, half-sobbing the words, and Caroline, burying her face in the bold sun-rising quilt, shed tears of her own.

But presently she looked up. Maumy was making a mighty effort to stem the tide of her emotion.

“ What done brung y’ all here? ” she asked, still stroking the dark hair tenderly. “ Look over yander by the table and bring up a cheer. I ain’t

gwine get up to-day. My rhumatiz is naggin' consid'able."

"Isn't there something I could do for it?"

Maumy looked wistfully toward the little cook stove that occupied the opposite corner.

"If y'-all woudn't mind heatin' up this here red flannel and puttin' a fresh tater in my bed — down longside them old jints in my knee ——"

"A potato, Maumy?"

"Yes'm, a tater. Don't y'-all know a fresh tater layin' longside the misery in yer jints gits the disease? Yes'm, it draws hit out'n you."

"Want it peeled, Maumy?"

"No, no'm, it don't have to be peeled. Jes wash it good."

"And warm it?"

"Well, 'taint gwine hurt one to warm it, I reckon. Ole Mammy Squires she don't say nothin' about heatin' it. She brung me this here rabbit's foot and charm stone, same day. 'Tween 'em all, I ought to be gettin' well, but I ain't. Hit takes time when you's old, honey. Old, like Maumy Rachel."

Her heavy sigh hurt Caroline.

"Who looks after you, Maumy, dear?" she asked, busy with the flannel at the stove.

“ Oh, the chillun — Darwin’s, and Mandy, his wife. But they all has their play and their work. They does the best they can. Only sometimes, honey, the flannel thar gits cole, and the tater needs changin’.”

“ Of course, I wonder if I could make you some tea — and a piece of toast.”

Maumy sniffed. “ *Y’-all* waitin’ on me! Humph! *Y’-all* — *quality!* ”

“ Where do you keep the bread? ”

Maumy’s longing got the better of her manners.

“ Over yander in the cupboard in the tin pail. There’s a mite of tea left, too, I reckon.”

Everything was clean and neat. Mandy’s bread lay fresh and sweet in its snowy cloth and the canister showed more than a pinch of tea. Evidently Maumy was not neglected. That news would rejoice the Major’s heart.

Maumy roused herself for the tea. With loving hands Caroline straightened the heavy pillows and lifted the shrunken shoulders to a position of comfort. Maumy’s eyes swam with unshed tears.

“ Lordy, Miss Car’line, but you’s a sight fer sore eyes. Now tell me all ’bout Miss Embly and the Major.”

Fifteen minutes of conversation cheered

Maumy, but Caroline soon realized that she was drooping and lowered the pillows. The old eyes closed wearily. When they opened again Maumy's mind wandered for a minute. She couldn't place Caroline. Her eyes strained until the yellow whites bulged.

"I war dreamin'," she whispered, "I war back with my fambly out in them Gord-forsaken mountains, talkin' to little Miss." She laughed softly — chuckled. "Lil debil," she murmured. "She war a handful. Most wear ole Maumy out sometimes. Miss Car'line! Miss Car'line, y'-all git outen my cookey jar! Y'-all got to stop feedin' that white trash down the road. I'se gwine tell Marse Major. Stop it now!"

Her voice had risen to a wild, pathetic wail. The door opened and Darwin's wife entered. She went quickly toward the bed. Caroline looked up gladly.

"Stop now, Maumy," Mandy said tenderly. "Ain't nothin' gwine bother you. Miss Caroline, she done put the cookies back. You go long off to sleep again."

"Is — is she like that often?" Caroline asked; her face had grown white and tender.

Mandy nodded. "Yes'm, she ain't herself

most of the time. Jes spells when she knows us. She ain't far from the end now. Who is you, Miss, if I may ask? "

Caroline explained. Mandy made haste to wipe off a chair and pull it forward.

" Maumy knew you? " she asked.

" Oh, yes, we had a nice visit."

Mandy nodded. " It's that-a-way sometimes, for a little while. Then she goes off again. We watches her mighty close. My cabin, hit's jes over thar." She pointed across the road. " Darwin, he done built a new cabin for his mother, but she wouldn't stay thar. She wanted to come back here where she could keep her eyes on the big house. Seem lak it meant a heap to her."

When Tevis came a few minutes later, Caroline had a hurried consultation with him on the porch.

" I think, if you don't mind," she said, " I will stay here with Maumy to-night. There's a nice easy chair where I can rest by the fire. I shall have so little time with her. You know " — for a moment she could not go on — " when we were little, and couldn't help ourselves, Maumy always stood by us. It seems so little to spend

one night watching beside her. Perhaps she won't know — but it will be a comfort to me."

Tervis reached out and patted her shoulder. "Come with me and have your dinner, and I will bring you back," he said. His voice was very sympathetic. "I understand how you feel about it. We lost Julie last year. My old nurse."

Maumy was not very clear during the night. Once or twice she realized that it was Caroline sitting in the firelight watching her, and stretched forth a hand yearningly.

"I allas said you'd turn out the best of 'em all, Miss Caroline," she said in one of those flashes. "Yes'm. You's the Major's own chile. An you's sweet like yer Maw. Miss Embly never scold me or lay a hand on me in my life; not even when I war young and rascally."

Then she would doze, and the firelight from the open door of the little stove would flicker on her peaceful face, giving it a sudden benignancy. It softened the stern mouth, it caressed the wrinkles about the closed eyes, brought out all that was best in the sunken face. Once, when Maumy wakened and asked for a drink of water, she mistook the girl beside her for another Caroline, and babbled to her softly.

“ Member that thar time, Miss Caroline, when we done hid Marse Gilbert from them soldiers up Norf? Member how we carried him ham and chicken and corn bread? No’m; no, Madame, I ain’t never gwine tell the Major and Miss Embly who you is — not if you make me promise. No’m — no’m.” This with a long sigh.

Caroline paid but little heed. Maumy was dreaming; living over those days during the war. It was only when she murmured, “ But you ain’t gwine fool Little Miss long. Not if you stays on here; them sharp eyes o’ hern see through ever’-thing. I’s warnin’ you. You listen to ole Maumy Rachel.”

Toward morning she grew very clear.

“ I ain’t done no talking has I, Lammie? ” she asked, with startled interest. “ I ain’t say nothing I hadn’t ought to say? ” Caroline made haste to reassure her.

After a while she asked, “ What ever become of that ole lady what live across the street from us out thar —— ” she nodded toward the West.

“ Madame — Madame —— ”

“ Wakefield, Maumy? ”

“ Yes’m. Ain’t she died yet? She’s ole enough.”

“ No, she is still living in England.”

“ Well — when you sees her — tell her ole Maumy send her respects. She war a fine lady. Don't you fergit, Miss Car'line. Maumy send her respects.”

“ Yes, Maumy.”

“ And Miss Leigh too. I always love Miss Leigh so, honey. She war half angel. And Miss Mayre and Miss Alison — all my fambly. I sends my — respects.”

She was sleeping peacefully when Tevis came for Caroline in the morning. The sun was well up and the birds were singing in the apple tree by the front door. Caroline tiptoed to the bed and bending down, left a kiss on the black forehead.

“ Thank you, Maumy dear,” she whispered softly, “ thank you for all you ever did for me — I shall never forget you.”

It was the last time that she ever gazed upon the beloved face.

CHAPTER X

LEIGH'S HOME

ALTHOUGH the visit to Alison had been gay and unusual, Caroline was quite ready to depart at the end of ten days. Tevis begged for a longer stay, and even Alison added her persuasions, but to no avail.

“We really must be getting settled in New York,” Caroline declared, “and there is the visit with Leigh. We cannot slight her after spending so long a time here.”

Leigh's home, after the cold formality of Alison's, was a beckoning light. Caroline had long held visions of that snug place, for Leigh's letters were full of it. She could scarcely wait to see the house with its old-fashioned treasures.

She and Mayre arrived later one autumn afternoon; a gray day, cold and blustery, but Blair and Leigh were both at the station to welcome them. Scarcely had she left the train when Leigh's motherly arms encircled her, and warm kisses fell upon her face.

“ We thought that you were never going to get here,” was Blair’s cordial comment, as he loaded a Red Cap with bags and boxes. “ Mind taking the Sub? We haven’t a limousine, you know. It wouldn’t do us much good if we had—in this mob! ”

They were out in the street now, in the deafening roar that, more than anything else, spelled New York and progress. Caroline stopped in the shelter of a huge store and caught her breath.

“ Mercy! ” she exclaimed, “ what Bedlam! Let me look a moment. Why, it’s a world gone mad! ”

And so indeed it seemed. Just opposite, a building in the process of construction added to the turmoil with hissing steam and groaning derricks. Overhead a railway rattled and banged its perilous course along heavy tracks and crossings; bells rang; voices were raised in confusion. The streets were filled with traffic. Motor cars darted this way and that, bold yellow and checkered taxis threaded their way daringly between delivery cars and high, human-freighted busses.

But out in the suburbs, in the sleepy little town that differed slightly from Caroline’s own Western town, she drew a sigh of relief. Dusk was

falling gently on cosy, unpretentious homes; lights gleamed a cheerful welcome in windows along the road (Blair's little Lizzie was waiting at the station) as they sped along merrily.

It was a happy and reunited party. Leigh's arms encircled both her sisters, and now and then she gave them each a squeeze, to make sure they were real flesh and blood, not an hallucination. It had been so long since they were all together.

And the house was just the kind of a house Caroline expected to find; large and commodious, set deep in its stately yard. They had scarcely reached the wide veranda when the front door was flung wide and a maid's face peered out smilingly.

"Yes, we are here at last, Alice," Leigh said, as if Alice were quite as much interested in the arrival as she herself. "The train was nearly an hour late. These are the girls, my sisters. I hope dinner is ready. We are quite starved."

"We are!" Blair added, stirring the fire in the living room and warming his hands before the leaping blaze. "Let's not wait for frills, Alice. The girls are home folks."

There was a hasty retreat to the guest chamber on the floor above, a superficial cleansing of hands and faces, and then a quick return to the dining

room where another fire blazed on the ample hearth.

Caroline leaned back in the handsome old chair that had once belonged to Blair's grandmother and sighed happily.

"To think that we are really here, Leigh, in your home! What's the definition of a home, anyway? Anybody ever look it up?"

"Yes; I did once—in fact, quite recently, while we were at Alison's." It was Mayre who spoke, her face flushed and happy. "I looked in the big Dick in Tevis's den. The place had been marked. It had a blue circle around it. 'The abiding place of the affections,' it said, or something like that."

Caroline bent unnecessarily low over her soup and Mayre looked as if she wished she had not spoken.

"'It takes a heap o' livin' in a house to make it home,'" Blair quoted. "Found the McElroys well, I presume? Fine chap, Tevis. Run on him occasionally in New York. Had him out to dine with us last time he turned up."

There was no mention of Alison. Leigh had inquired after her at the station. There was a long visit before the fire in the living room after

dinner: home news, small-town gossip, Caroline called it. Leigh and Blair were both interested. Blair asked, "How about Jimmy; how is he looking?"

"Perfectly stunning in his soldier clothes," Mayre answered, to Caroline's delight. She could not speak of Jimmy. Not to his cousin, anyway. She knew that Blair quite adored him, would want all the details.

But it was later, upstairs in Leigh's tiny sitting-room with its soft lights and deep cushioned chairs, that the real heart-to-heart visit came. Mayre had retired, and Blair was finishing his evening smoke and paper downstairs.

"Caroline," Leigh said, going to her writing desk and taking out a letter, "I am so sorry, dear, but I have some news that will distress you, I fear——"

Caroline's heart bounded and stood still.

"Not Major! He is well!"

"Yes, darling, he is well. It is Maumy, Caroline. Please do not be too upset. I thought best to tell you right away—so that we can go on with our visit happily."

Caroline took the letter from the envelope and read it slowly, scarcely comprehending at first.

“Is it from Mandy?” she asked. Mandy wrote very well, considering her limited education.

Dear Miss Leigh [the letter began]:

I takes my pen in hand to inform you that Darwin's mother, Rachel, your old nurse, passed away last Sunday morning or sometime in the night. We don't know just when. Miss Caroline, she was with her, but I expects she thought Maumy was just sleeping and didn't try to wake her. Darwin is all broke up, for he loved his mother, but it was a wonderful way to go after all her pain and everything. She had been mighty restless for some time, talking a heap about you all, especially Miss Caroline, who, excuse me, Miss Leigh, for saying it, was always her favorite, lest it was Marse Major. Seem like after Miss Caroline come in that afternoon she was satisfied to go. They had a good visit, and Miss Caroline she stayed all night a heating her flannel and her potato which she thought helped her rheumatiz. Maybe when you see Miss Caroline she can give you more particulars. The funeral was on Tuesday from the Baptist church. You know Maumy always wanted to be buried from the big yaller house you all lived in so long, but I didn't darse ask the new owner, so we done the best we could. She leave considerable fortune to Darwin and the children. A thousand dollars in the saving bank and five hundred dollars done up in a old handkerchief in the bottom of the flour bar'l underneath

the flour. I got a suspicion thar was something thar, for she was so tetchy like bout my going near the barl. She wasn't always herself toward the last and she say something bout a ole lady givin' her some money one time. I reckon maybe that was it. I will send it to Marse Major if you say so, though I done know she want the chillun to have it.

I hope you all won't feel bad as she was awful ole and her jints aked consid'able. Seem like she wanted to go, but was just waiting for something, Miss Caroline, maybe. The good Lord He's got his own way bout managin' things. I sens my respects to you all and hopes if you ever come this way you won't ferget to let us see you.

Respectfully,

MANDY JONES.

Caroline raised burning eyes from the letter. Slowly tears gathered and trickled down her cheeks. She made no effort to check them. Presently she said with a sigh, "Dear, dear old Maumy. How much we owe her, Leigh! And to think I could do those last little things for her after the years she served us. I knew she wanted me. She said when I warmed the flannel, 'Cain't y' all set awhile, Miss Caroline? The nights get so long; Mandy does the best she can, but the flannels need warming up.' "

"Of course, I stayed. She was restless for

awhile, and I sat beside her — singing her old nursery songs — the ones she used to put us to sleep by: you remember — ‘The wind is in the west; the turkey’s in his nest — sleep — sleep — sleep.’ Sometimes I patted her a little — old people are so like little children when they are ill — and toward morning she dropped into such a quiet, sweet rest. Oh, Leigh, I can’t believe she’s gone, blessed old Maumy. But I am so thankful I was with her. I can never be thankful enough. Perhaps she *was* waiting for some of us — her own folks, who knows? ”

“ Perhaps, dear; who indeed? ”

“ And she didn’t come out the front door of the old house — the last time — as she always longed to come, did she? And she didn’t have the roses and the sheaf of wheat —— ”

“ Oh, yes, she did,” Leigh answered softly. “ I knew the end was near, and I wrote to Miss Jennie Randolph — sent her some money. Maumy had her flowers, plenty of them —— ”

“ Leigh! ” The words were scarcely audible. “ How wonderful you are! Do you ever forget anything? ”

“ Many things, dear, but not kindness — I hope. Please, now, let us not be unhappy. Maumy’s

had her little day — just as we all have it. She made the world better for passing through it. Let us be happy for her, not sorrowful.”

The week at Leigh's passed like a happy dream. Years later Caroline remembered those fleeting hours with profit and understanding. Leigh was not only a good wife and sister; she was a good neighbor. Sometimes Caroline marveled at her courage, for Leigh still looked frail.

Yet she always found time to do for others. Either it was Mrs. Brooks, the charming young matron next door, running in with Billy, her infant son, saying, “ Mrs. Newland, I know it is an awful imposition, but could I leave Billy with you for an hour while I go to market; that dreadful Ted of mine just telephoned that he is bringing guests to dinner, and not a thing in the house.” Or, “ Would you have time to cut that pattern for me that we were speaking of yesterday? ” Or some one across the street would ask if Mrs. Newland could go shopping, she “ did so want her advice about those linens.”

And, almost always, Leigh found time. Sometimes Blair would scold, but she would answer, “ Now that's perfectly all right, dear. I ask

favours too, you know. I can't let people be kinder to me than I am to them."

Caroline enjoyed the neighbors. She liked having them drop in for afternoon tea — the hour when Alice drew together the heavy velvet curtains at the living-room door and stirred the fire to its ruddiest hue. She liked romping with the children who came with their mothers; enjoyed filling their plump little hands with Leigh's fresh hermits, made as Maumy used to make them. Best of all, perhaps, she liked the cosy evenings when the young married people dropped in for a game of bridge or an informal dance. College men and women, most of them, and the conversation invariably turned to the big games, fraternity life and experiences. Two weeks slipped by without any one's dreaming they had passed until Caroline was one morning confronted with the calendar. Then she began to repack the wardrobe trunk that had been emptied and sent to the attic. But she was not really leaving Leigh. It would be so easy to reach her when she needed counsel, so easy to run over for week-end visits. And Leigh would drop in for lunch when she came to the city to shop. They were going to be wonder-

fully chummy and companionable — after working hours!

Blair, born and reared in New York, had suggestions relative to a studio.

“ I don't think I want to see you too close to Washington Square,” he said one evening, when the subject came up, and Caroline answered briskly, “ But that's just where we want to be: in the thick of things — the artists' colony.”

“ I have an old aunt in Irving Place,” Blair went on, as if he were making the arrangements, not Caroline, “ who doesn't use half her house. I've been wondering if she would let you and Mayre have a couple of rooms. I fancy it wouldn't bother her any; she's almost stone deaf and not too opulent. Perhaps —— ”

“ We might see her when we go into the city to-morrow,” Caroline capitulated, not wishing to seem ungrateful.

Blair took his lunch hour to go with her and Mayre, and Leigh went along. She and Blair, knowing New York and its environs, were deeply interested in that studio venture. They had their own ideas on the subject.

Irving Place proved a quiet, self-respecting street with three-story houses wedged in between

apartments and candy factories, yet savoring a little of aristocracy, with Gramercy Park but a block away.

Miss Pell, a maiden lady of some seventy summers, opened the door herself and welcomed her nephew warmly. Then she adjusted her ear trumpet and inquired his errand. It was evident that Blair did not often honor her with his presence.

The matter of letting a room or two was put to her. She seemed embarrassed. She had never let rooms, of course, few did in Irving Place; but she would be most happy to entertain the young ladies during their stay in New York.

Blair, shouting into the trumpet, explained that they were locating permanently in New York and desired a quiet, respectable place where they could carry on their work. One was an artist — the other a writer.

Miss Pell considered. The top floor was untenanted, but it was little more than attic, one large room running the entire length of the house, lighted for the most part by an improvised skylight.

“ You aren’t using the third story now, are you, Aunt Sophia? ” Blair howled into the trumpet.

Miss Pell was obliged to shake her head.

“ I really don't think the young ladies would annoy you in the least. Could we have a look at it? ”

Of course they could look. Together they climbed the long flight of stairs that led to the top of the house. Miss Pell shook a heavy door that yielded only when Blair lent his strength.

It was a musty cobwebby place, but Mayre saw the skylight and clasped her hands together ecstatically. Caroline took in the length of the room, fitted the old Kirtley sofa in one corner, Great-aunt Caroline's picture in the space between the two small windows and slipped her arm through Miss Pell's hopefully.

“ If you would only try us,” she coaxed, with the smile that never failed to win, “ we would be quiet as mice — and very grateful.”

In the end Miss Pell promised to have the place cleaned and put in order. She was not sure about the rent — what would be a fair price; Blair could make inquiry and let her know.

Caroline's happy feet fairly danced down the aged walnut stairs. That old attic room, barn-like and cold, meant accomplishment. There she could think and write and dream, wrest her future

from its solitude. At last the way had opened. Life stretched before her in a rosy mist. It seemed to her as she hurried back through the crowds, helping Leigh over perilous crossings (Blair had returned to his office) that it was just beginning for her, that up to the present she had been learning how to live, like an infant taking his first steps, helped by his mother's hand. Henceforth she would walk alone — unaided. In the corners of that dim old room success was awaiting her.

CHAPTER XI

NEW YORK

SPRING was late in New York. It lagged and frowned. From the eaves of Miss Pell's attic windows water dripped mournfully, and the wind, resting for awhile, swept down the street with added force.

Caroline Ravenel, bending over a kitchen table which she had turned into a desk, drew a woolen shawl closer about her shoulders and for the third time tried to concentrate upon the work before her.

“Aren't you cold, dear?” Mayre asked from her corner across the room. “I really think we should get more coal; spring seems a long way off yet. Have you your sweater on?”

Caroline nodded and, lifting a corner of the shawl, disclosed the thick jacket. For a moment the click, click of her infant typewriter was the only sound that competed with wind and water. Mayre sketched in silence. Presently she rose, shivering, and taking the poker stirred the coals

in the tiny stove that, ugly and inefficient, accentuated the barrenness of the room. Barren, despite the Kirtley sofa and Great-aunt Caroline's portrait. The stove jutted obtrusively from the north wall and a screened kitchen cabinet (which Mayre had painted gray with a vine of morning-glories wandering serenely around the border) kept it company. The sofa faced the stove, a bit rebelliously, Caroline sometimes thought, considering its former grandeur, and at the other end of the room, a folding bed reared its stalwart head,—a bed that was at once a comfort and an eyesore.

“We couldn't have our friends up here if we didn't have it,” Caroline always remarked, when Mayre condemned its lines and length. “It's comfortable too, which is more than you can say of couches. I know. I've tried them. Used to have one on the porch at the Sorority house. The mattress was always sliding to the floor and the covers dragging with it.”

Beyond the stove, obscured by a Japanese screen a little the worse for wear (Mayre had discovered it in a second-hand shop), there was another kitchen table, neatly covered with a white oilcloth, and, adjacent (so near that, seated at

the table one could reach out and comfortably turn a pancake or a chop), an electric plate. It stood on a wide shelf that served as a sink and pot receptacle; it also held an assortment of mixing bowls.

The room was not the cosy place that Caroline has pictured it in the first flush of her enthusiasm, but it answered all purposes and was easy to keep in order. Rising early, she made the fire, prepared the coffee and toast, swept a little around her own desk and Mayre's easel, then went diligently to work while Mayre washed the cups and plates and the white oilcloth on the table.

It was a simple system of housekeeping and quite consistent with the life that went on in the room.

"It isn't as if we weren't used to better things," Mayre once sighed as she dried the oilcloth and restored the cups to the nails above the shelf. "And we have those pretty blue dishes in the cabinet for tea and an occasional supper."

There was another ornament to the space behind the screen. It hung from a nail underneath the shelf and was only taken down on Monday morning and set on a two-legged bench furnished from the basement; a round corrugated washtub

innocent of board, for Caroline had discarded its offspring the first time she rubbed the skin from her delicate knuckles.

But for all the place was barren and ugly, there was a touch of home about it. Red geraniums bloomed in the high, deep-silled windows; cheap, but decorative Japanese curtains hung, scant and colorful, at the sides; portières camouflaged a closet, from which Mayre's little, high-heeled, black satin mules, or the toes of Caroline's heavier tan walking shoes, were always peeping.

Sometimes one caught a glimpse of a bright kimono or a gay little petticoat thrown across one of the gray kitchen chairs, or, curled contentedly on a round cushion, a portly black cat that had strayed from Miss Pell's basement.

Sometimes Miss Williams — Miss Pell had dignified her with the name in memory of a former neighbor — left the cushion and perched herself on Caroline's desk to drowse in the shifting sunshine or blink to the click of Caroline's keys as her busy fingers raced over the machine. She was a comfortable, responsive creature and a welcome guest whenever she chose to come to the "studio."

"Maumy used to say a black cat was such a

good mascot," Mayre once said as she stroked the silky fur — Miss Williams was half Angora — "and I think it's rather a good omen that she has adopted us." Maumy's sacred teachings would never be altogether obliterated from belief and memory.

But if Miss Williams were the forerunner of success, she was far in advance of her mission. Six months had passed since Caroline had first pressed Miss Pell for an answer in regard to her attic, six long discouraging months, yet not without interest and accomplishment.

Things had gone rather well at first. There were few worries so long as Caroline's treasured bank account lasted,—for Caroline was the provider. To her the Major had entrusted his offering of three hundred dollars with the request that she write to him for more when the amount was exhausted. But Caroline had no intention of asking for more, not so long as the thoughts that raced in her busy brain were clear and marketable.

It was strange how the money had taken wings, but with "everything going out and nothin' comin' in," as Maumy used to say, one could, after all, understand. There was the rent, small

and reasonable to be sure — twenty-five dollars a month — and the coal, not a heavy item, but a persistent one; kindling too, in small quantities; provisions; butter and flour and eggs with an occasional steak, or chops. It was amazing how fast money could be eaten up, literally, for meat and eggs in New York had their own intrinsic value. Or perhaps Caroline thought they were higher, paid for. They had so long been accepted at home in barter for her father's skill. But now, seventy-five cents for a little steak that served two stingily, and fifty for three or four chops that merely encouraged one's appetite, never satisfied it, seemed an extravagance beyond their simple needs.

And Caroline, who kept the purse strings in her own capable hands, had her subterfuges. Mayre must be looked after and indulged at any cost; Mayre, never too robust, who had given up her comfortable room at home to come with her to seek a fortune. It was Mayre who slept on the side of the bed next to the stove, away from the window; Mayre who always had an egg at breakfast, who took a bus or subway while Caroline walked. Not that she was selfish. She was simply ignorant of the dwindling purse; she seldom got

beneath the Kirtley shell that shut out Caroline's inner self and motives. A gentle dignity served as bars. Sometimes Mayre resented it; sometimes she deplored it, but always she respected it and held her peace.

"You aren't eating enough," Mayre would sometimes complain, when Caroline urged upon her a second helping. "You are getting too thin." To which Caroline would reply, "I'm keeping my 'figger' down, my dear, so that you can put me into those screens you are painting. I'm like the wife of poor old Andrea Del Sarto. I serve for the models you require." And she would laugh and stretch her slender shoulders in the blue serge frock that hung in straight becoming lines, girdled only by an odd silver chain that gave it distinction.

But Leigh understood. Sometimes she and Alice came in laden with a basket full of goodies; home-baked bread and pies; fruits and jellies; sometimes a large round cake that Caroline declared was "blousy with chocolate!" Those were feast days, so regularly followed by laziness and indigestion that Caroline begged for less indulgence.

Leigh was such a comfort. It was so good to

know that she was over there just across the river, though Caroline and Mayre did not see half enough of her. There was always the matter of carfare — a small item, but one to be reckoned with — and the loss of time from the studio. There was a chance of some one answering the concisely worded advertisement that semi-occasionally appeared in the *World* or *Times*.

The Misses Ravenel — Irving Place. Screens decorated for boudoirs and fireplaces. Manuscripts of novels, short stories and plays corrected, edited and typed.

It was a bold announcement; the latter half sometimes took Caroline's own breath away, but she knew her ground. She read many stories in magazines that she felt she could improve in style and technique, if she couldn't sell her own. But she was not discouraged. There was another old saying of Maumy's — how often they came to mind now that she was gone — 'A bad beginning makes a good ending.' She was slow in making a start, that was all. Success still played with her in the dark recesses of the cold, bleak room. Sometimes it came out and laughed with her and winked and beckoned; sometimes it disappeared in sullen

silence. That was when she, herself, was moody and weak-hearted.

Mayre had been a trifle more fortunate. Two or three orders had come her way. She was busy with one this minute, holding to the light a sample of soft green satin to catch the tones in paint. It was a screen she was working upon, a tall, three-sided affair with nymphs dancing across a daisied landscape, a mild blue sky overhead. She had asked fifty dollars for the work, but her patron, a fat foreign dowager, had brought the price down to twenty-five. She sighed as she came back from the stove and seated herself at her work again.

Caroline's typewriter continued to race. Finally she came down upon a letter with a bang and turned in her seat.

"There!" she cried, waving a blue-looking hand in the air. "That's done, and Mr. Morrow can take it or leave it as he likes. Wasn't there a stick of kindling, honey? It is rather coldish, isn't it?"

"I'm freezing, Caroline."

Caroline walked over to the window. She stood looking out for a minute and turned with a smile.

“ It ’s going to clear,” she said; “ I feel it in my bones.”

“ I thought you only felt it in your bones when it was going to pour,” Mayre answered with a wry smile. Mayre was very pretty when she smiled. She had a habit of screwing her lip to one side which produced a dimple in her pink cheek. Her teeth, too, were very white and even, and, although she was two years Caroline’s senior, she looked three or four years younger.

Caroline came back from the window and stood before the screen.

“ It’s lovely,” she said, edging away to better the effect. “ Those girls are really dancing. There’s movement in those feet.”

She broke off suddenly and frowned. “ You were an awful goose to let it go for twenty-five dollars. I wish I had been here; I should never have permitted it.”

“ But Caroline, she was so big and — and ——”

“ Persuasive. Yes, I suppose so. But after this, say you will speak with your sister about the price.”

“ But that’s so childish.”

“ No, I am firmer, that’s all. But never mind; maybe she will tell others.”

“ She has; there’s an address in my pocket-book. I was to call this morning; one of those fashionable places in Fifty-eighth Street where they are remodeling tenements. Oh, Caroline, don’t you want to go up and have a look for me? Tell me what she wants done? I must finish this thing, now, while the mood’s on.”

“ But you are almost done.”

“ Nearly; I don’t just like this foot ” — she lightly touched one of the maidens with her brush.

“ You were going to see Mr. Morrow, anyway.”

“ Yes; well, all right, give me the number.”

Mayre joyfully ran to her purse. “ You’re a dear,” she said, as she searched among papers and coins. “ Those rich people scare me to death. You are different. They always seem afraid of you.”

“ You imagine that.”

“ Not at all. You have such a way of crushing them when they presume. I don’t know what it is — something in your eyes and the way you draw up your shoulders — like father. It’s a look that says — ‘ So far and no farther, if you please.’ Oh, here it is at last: Mrs. Abner Van Tyne. She said to call between eleven and twelve in the morning. You just have time to make it if you hurry.”

Caroline pulled aside the curtain that obscured her winter coat and best street hat. Donning them, she paused for a moment before the small cracked mirror that hung above a chest of drawers and fastened a fur collar snug about her throat. It was very becoming, that bit of fur the Major had insisted upon buying for her; golden beaver that nestled against her brown neck and deepened the tan in her yellow eyes. A strip of it had found its way to the brown hat that she pulled down over her thick glossy hair, leaving saucy tendrils to defy the rain and wind.

“Mrs. Abner Van Tyne will think royalty is descending upon her,” Mayre said, reaching up for a good-by kiss. “You always look so aristocratic and well-bred — perhaps because you are tall,” she finished admiringly. “Little people are never commanding.” She smiled as she dropped back in the gray kitchen chair.

Caroline gathered up her papers, rolled them together and secured them with a rubber band.

“Make yourself some tea, won’t you?” she called from the door, “and there’s plenty of Leigh’s strawberry jam left for your bread. Eat it, please. Don’t leave it round to tempt me, or

you'll have to find a new model. Nobody ever saw a fat nymph! "

She closed the door, and Mayre heard her laugh as she clattered down the bare stairs.

The wind had halted a little as Caroline reached the front door, and the rain had changed to snow; wet, blustery flakes, half drizzle. She turned toward the subway and reluctantly got out her car-fare. " I think you've got your nerve," she said, glancing up at the drifting gray clouds, " to act like this in March; making people travel underground when they might be atop a bus."

The Fifth Avenue busses were Caroline's special delight. She adored climbing the crooked little stairway that led to the top, lurching forward to a seat. It was interesting, even on cold days, to look down on the horde of human beings darting in and out below, to do her window shopping from such an advantageous point; to ponder on the discontented faces that rose above a wealth of furs in costly limousines, watch the cabs dare traffic and surface cars. But there was no such luxury to-day. Time and weather forbade. The wind was still shrieking when she reached her destination and turned in at the quaint door set in its frame of dull brick.

“ Miss Ravenel,” she said to the man who admitted her. “ Please say to Mrs. Van Tyne that I have come to see about the decorating she wants done.”

She followed him through the dimly lighted hall to the room beyond. It made her think of a candy box, with its flowing lace curtains and ornate furniture. Groping her way to a far corner she sat down on a low sofa that stretched its velvet length before an artificial fire.

The place was very silent, and for a few moments she amused herself taking in the details of the overcrowded room. It was typical of several she had seen during her short stay in New York, — pretentious, with a *nouveau riche* atmosphere that grated upon her simple taste. There were gilded cabinets that held miniature elephants and lions skilfully carved in ivory; costly bric-à-brac. The walls were hung with pictures, ponderous paintings that choked restful spaces; rugs lapped one another; marble pedestals held snowy statuary — Psyche in the arms of Cupid and Hermes looking like a glorified buddy.

She was sitting quietly, her hands, encased in rather shabby gloves, crossed complacently in her lap, when a slight noise aroused her from reverie.

She turned, almost hidden by the dim light and high-backed sofa, to see a boy of some five or six years pause and peer into the room questioningly. He came a step forward and his dark handsome eyes took a sweeping glance. Then he darted back again and looked down the hall. Caroline, unobserved in her dark corner, watched him with interest.

Evidently convincing himself that he was safe from prying eyes, he dropped down on his knees and spread a newspaper before him. Then, from his coat pockets he began to dislodge sand, loose golden sand so dear to every childish heart. For a moment he played with it, letting it trickle through his fingers, smiling as the grains tinkled on the paper. Suddenly, with one of his quick furtive movements, he darted toward a growing palm and brought forth a small stick, evidently cached away for this very moment.

He laughed as he squatted again before the newspaper and vigorously spat into the sand. Then with the stick he began to mix sand and saliva, stirring and heaping, shaping and patting, — happy and absorbed.

For a moment Caroline could not fathom his antics, then all at once she understood. He was

making mud pies! Mud pies in his gilded cage, in his candy-box home.

She wanted to go over to him, kneel down and help him mold and fuss, but before she had quite made up her mind, a step on the stair startled them both. The boy bent low over his paper, trying to hide it from view, but his mother's sharp eyes were too quick for him.

Her peremptory, "Styverson!" brought him to his feet with a bound. He hung his handsome head in shame.

Caroline had risen, coming forward with a smile. Mrs. Van Tyne pushed a button near the door.

"Remove this litter," she said to the maid who appeared almost instantly, "and take Styverson to the nursery. See that his hands are scrubbed and his nails cleaned and polished."

She turned to Caroline with an apologetic laugh.

"It is amazing, the things children will do," she remarked. "Sometimes I think Styverson the most unnatural child in the world."

"Unnatural! I was just thinking how very sane and normal he was!" The words came from

Caroline's lips before she thought. Then, a bit confused, she made known her errand.

She saw the child again, later. He had been taken to the nursery which Mrs. Van Tyne wanted redecorated. He was standing listlessly before a window, watching the storm, his hands thrust in his empty pockets. He did not turn as they entered the room and Caroline suspected that his eyes were wet. His mother paid no attention, chatting about the birds and animals she wanted refreshed in the strip that served as border to the room, and of the screens in her sitting room on the floor below.

Caroline's glance strayed from the room filled with costly toys and furnishings to the drooping child at the window. She wondered why people reared children in a crowded city, and her thoughts shot over the little dark head pressed against the pane on out to the West; to wide, open spaces, wind-swept and free; to children digging in Nature's sand piles, or galloping on their ponies out toward the mesa, their curls flying in the breeze.

The mesa ——

She turned again to Mrs. Van Tyne, conscious of the crimson stain that dyed her face.

“ I will bring my sister to see the work on Monday,” she said rather hurriedly. “ I’m quite sure you will find her reasonable and satisfactory.”

She was well down the street when the flush died. She had resolutely turned her thoughts to the next encounter — with Mr. William Morrow.

CHAPTER XII

CAROLINE MEETS AN OLD FRIEND

BUT though she had persistently turned her thoughts from Jimmy Ludlow, she could not shake off visions of towering mountains, monumental sand piles and blue arching skies. A verse beat in upon her brain, sung itself into her heart:

Out where the handclasp's a little stronger,
Out where the smile dwells a little longer,
That's where the West begins;
Out where the sun is a little brighter,
Where the snows that fall are a trifle whiter,
Where the bonds of home are a wee bit tighter,
That's where the West begins.

Sometimes she longed so for that big beautiful West. Sometimes she wondered why she had stayed on in the East, cooped up in Miss Pell's musty attic, courting the will of the gods. Sometimes it all seemed so futile, — this morning, with the coal sack empty again and the cupboard in need of replenishment.

In those early dreams of success she had not

figured on bodily wants and comforts. When one has never known poverty, one scarcely contemplates it. At home, though money was often scarce, the flour bin was never empty, and always there were vegetables and fruits in abundance. Maumy used to rebel occasionally — when Leigh, watching the bills, cut out roast ham and bacon for breakfast, saying, “ Miss Leigh, *we’s e got to have it*; we belong to folks that *jus has to has!*”

But there were always so many things, with love to leaven them. Now it was all so different.

The snow was beating in her face as she stood on the corner and contemplated the ten blocks that would take her to William Morrow’s office. Should she spend the money, the paltry amount that would shoot her through the subway and land her there in five minutes, or should she brave the icy wind and plow on with the chance of missing him?

She felt of the soft knitted purse in her deep coat pocket. It was pathetically lean; pennies scraped against quarters and dimes. She knew the contents without looking. Seventy-six cents, to be exact — and coal and food to buy. She chose the pavement and started on, as speedily as the wind and snow would permit.

Mr. Morrow was leaving the office as she entered. He greeted her with a pleasant smile. He was a young man, tall and lean of face but with kindly blue eyes that seemed to appraise one's capacity at a glance.

“Sorry, Miss Ravenel, but I've an appointment in five minutes. Want to see you too. Could you wait — or will you shop until early afternoon? I can promise you a few minutes at two.”

Caroline hesitated but a moment. She would attend to some errands and come back. She turned into Fifth Avenue and walked close to the plate-glass windows, sheltered by awning and doorways. The wind was dying, snow giving place to rain. She had left her umbrella, a useless encumbrance in a wind storm, and the glistening drops pelted her rough storm coat. She had been foolish, she thought, not to wait in Mr. Morrow's warm office. There were always magazines and papers to while away the time.

She had reached one of the large dry-goods stores and was making her way to the book department — a favorite retreat — when some one caught her arm, and an eager voice said:

“Caroline Ravenel! I never saw such sprinting in my life. I've been trying to catch you for a

block. Made me think of those marathons you used to run for your eight o'clock at Cal! How are you, anyway? "

It was her erstwhile roommate, Susan Stirling.

Although it was the noon hour and the aisles crowded with shoppers there was an ecstatic greeting. Caroline returned Susan's kiss with feeling. They stood for a moment, laughing and looking into each other's eyes. It was Susan who found voice first.

"My word, Cal dear," she said with a familiarity that warmed Caroline's heart, "what's the matter with you—you are so thin, but lovely as ever, I must say."

"Thanks a lot! You are able to be about yourself, I take it." Again they laughed, linked arms and strolled on.

"Where are you going? " It was Susan who asked the question.

"Just loafing for an hour. Have an appointment at two."

"Fine! What's the matter with having lunch together? "

Caroline's hand again pressed her lean purse.

"I really don't think I could eat lunch, Susan. I had a late breakfast."

“ Nonsense! You’re going to come along with me. My treat. Let’s go over to Schrafft’s. I’m crazy about their coffee and date muffins.”

It was useless to protest, Susan had her arm through Caroline’s and was pulling her along.

“ All right, nothing more then — just the muffins. They do sound good.”

Across the little table which held two so cosily, Caroline viewed her old friend with pleasure. Susan had changed but little, a trifle older, more careless if anything in appearance, more cordial and winning.

Caroline noted the clumsy dull green coat with its hard horn buttons, the rakish hat from which wisps of wet, taffy-colored hair straggled, the merry, bright eyes, and wide friendly smile. How well she remembered her first introduction — up in the Sorority bedroom, when Susan had burst in upon her with her day’s find — a long wiggly snake.

“ Doing any bug and beetle hunting these days, Susan? ” she inquired.

Susan shook her head. “ No, I don’t get out much. Of course you know I’m working — at Columbia. Teaching a bit on the side. Luck’s coming my way at last.”

She leaned closer (the near-by tables were crowded) and laid a warm hand on Caroline's. "Funniest thing happened," she said in a low voice. "Dad's married again. Can you beat it? Fifty-six last spring. To a peach of a woman — a cunning little old maid who thinks the sun rises and sets in him. And — she likes me too. That's the queer part. Quite crazy about me, Dad says." She spoke in her old staccato tones.

"Susan, how splendid!"

"Isn't it?" She lifted her head and her eyes shone. "Very thing I needed. Mother. You ought to see how she's fixed me up. Clothes and everything. Oh, this — I know I'm a mess this morning, but I had to fly. But my room. At home. You'd think I was a *débutante*. All pink and white, with ruffy flimijigs at the windows, and wicker fluff dubs — cushioned chairs, you know. Great! And my own bath."

"I hope you don't turn snakes into it!"

"Sometimes. She doesn't mind. She's something of a scientist herself. That's how she caught Dad. In one of his classes. Funniest thing ever."

"Has she — means?"

"Money? My dear — scads! And she's

generous. Fancy me with an allowance! Remember how I used to borrow your clothes? ”

“ I’m afraid I do, Susan.”

“ Well, if you ever need a lift, come to me. Turn about’s fair play.”

It was ten minutes of two when they parted, with promises of an early visit. Caroline turned toward Mr. Morrow’s office with a lighter heart. Good old Susan, she thought. What a joy it was to see her!

Mr. Morrow was waiting for her, prompt to the minute. He closed the door to his private office and drew up a chair for her. He studied her face with his scrutinizing eyes, then said abruptly:

“ How would you like to join our staff, Miss Ravenel? ”

For a moment the room seemed to swim around Caroline. She opened her tawny eyes in surprise. Was Mr. Morrow joking? Could it be possible that he wanted her, a young, green graduate, to take a place on one of the leading magazines of the day?

“ In what capacity, Mr. Morrow? ” she managed to stammer.

“ Editorial—in a way. Reading manuscripts. If you could see the mass that arrives daily.

Salary isn't much, but the work isn't hard. You will simply open the stuff and see whether it's worth passing on to the readers; see that it's legible, in good English and — promising. See? ”

Still a bit dazed she answered, “ I see. You think I am capable? ”

“ Shouldn't ask you otherwise.” His words were as short and crisp as Susan's. “ And now about the salary.”

“ The salary really doesn't matter so much — so I can live on it. I want experience.”

“ Yes. Well, to begin with, the salary will be thirty dollars a week.”

Caroline's heart took a violent leap.

“ That would be quite satisfactory.”

Mr. Morrow rose. It was an invitation for her to go.

“ Shall we say Monday then? ” he asked.

“ I shall be here. At what time? ”

“ Nine, sharp.”

She took the roll of manuscript from her pocket and handed it to him. He tossed it upon his desk and bowed her out.

Although the skies were still dark and the rain settling into a steady drizzle, her heart sang as she made for the subway. A block from home she

stopped at a dingy stand and ordered a sack of coal.

She was whistling when she opened the attic door. Caroline never sang. She couldn't, but her whistle was as clear and true as a boy's. The jaunty air reached Mayre, huddled under a comforter on the bed.

“Honey, are you so cold?” Caroline asked anxiously. “Well, cheer up. I have just ordered coal. It will be here in a few minutes. The man promised it faithfully. I'm going to fill that old fraud over there until it roars. Think maybe I'll get a new stove. One with a grate that we can poke. I adore poking coals — Why, Mayre, you're not crying! What's the matter?”

She was down on her knees beside the sobbing child (Mayre always seemed that to her), her arms around her.

“I reckon I'm not a good sport, Caroline,” Mayre said, trying to choke back sobs, “but I am awfully sick of it — awfully! Sick of sitting around bundled to my ears in sweaters and shawls and having to eat horrid things. I don't like — rice and prunes and baked beans. Sometimes I get to thinking about Father and Mother and the little cottage and Mrs. Ludlow — and I wonder,

Caroline, if we aren't making a mistake staying on here — if the game's worth the candle. There's that screen. I've worked for nearly ten days on it — for twenty-five paltry dollars."

"Plus experience, Mayre. Don't forget that. It's a valuable asset."

"I suppose it is — but I want money. I know how to paint — well enough for that fat old woman ——"

"Sch — dear," Caroline comforted, her own face deep in the pillow. "Now you just lie still. You're tired. I'm going to run downstairs and beg some hot water and fill a bottle for you to snuggle up to; then after you are warm and comfy, I'll tell you some wonderful news. Scrumptious! "

Mayre raised herself on an elbow. "Tell me now," she begged.

"I've got a job, Mayre. A job at thirty dollars a week! "

"Where? "

"With Mr. Morrow — reading manuscripts. You won't be cold any longer. We're going to be terribly affluent." She stopped suddenly. "Tell you what we 'll do. We 'll celebrate. This very night. Put on our best togs and dine at that



“I’ll tell you some wonderful news. Scrumptious!”

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heavenly Italian restaurant in Twenty-seventh Street. Remember the night Blair took us there? Leigh said it was awfully cheap; dollar fifteen a plate, or something like that; four courses: *soup*, honey, and salad; crispy green things; and *chicken* and *spaghetti* and hard French bread with unsalted butter — and ice cream for a wind-up! ”

Mayre was sitting up now, smiling.

“ It sounds too good to be true,” she said, sighing happily. “ But maybe it will cheer us up a bit. I should love it.”

And presently, with Mayre napping, snug against her hot-water bottle, Caroline, swathed in shawl and sweater, was tearing off page after page of paper from a cheap white pad, chronicling the news to her father.

You remember, Major (she said, among other things), my telling you about the day I took my courage in my hands and went to see Mr. Morrow, the literary editor of —— and of how he tried me out on some articles a friend had brought him for suggestions. He must have rather liked what I did, for he has given me other work from time to time and this afternoon offered me a position on his staff — a very simple and perhaps inconsequential one, but anyway it gives us a stated income, and Mayre and I are feeling as opulent as old Maumy Rachel used to feel when Leigh

banked her month's salary. Remember how she always insisted upon buying me a new hair ribbon, or a linen handkerchief that you could tell was *real linen* by wetting a spot with your tongue, and holding it up to the light? Dear old Maumy, Scarcely a day passes but we speak of her.

And a few hours later, in "the best togs," which were most becoming, Caroline and Mayre found themselves dining in the pleasant, softly lighted restaurant, chatting over their roast chicken and Italian spaghetti, warm and cosy and comfortable, forgetful of the rain which had settled into an all-night drizzle.

But Caroline soon found that the daily adjustment to a business life precluded the possibility of writing. It was her first experience at working seven hours a day with only a slight intermission at lunch time. She was often very tired at night and Mayre was forced to become the housekeeper.

Usually, when Caroline came in, she had a cheerful fire in the little stove (the weather was pleasanter now) with the teakettle steaming and singing upon it, and Miss Williams comfortably curled on a corner of the old sofa or chair, drawn close.

Barren and cheap as it all was, Caroline would scurry to the closet to hang away her coat and

hat, and drawing Miss Williams into her lap, exclaim, "There's no place like home, be it ever so humble!"

Sometimes she would tell Mayre of the day's happenings as they ate their frugal meal, and Mayre would add her experiences in quest of work. Often there were letters. Mrs. Ravenel wrote frequently; chatty letters which always surprised her daughters, for she seldom left her own doorsteps; but she managed through the daily papers, Martha, and Mrs. Ludlow, to keep them posted on the village happenings. "Mrs. Ludlow thinks Jimmy is working far too hard," she wrote, "burying himself at his office. However, he is very successful; one sees and hears his name frequently. Your father thinks him an exemplary young man"—a sentence that always made Caroline smile, knowing how Jim would dislike the compliment. He was far too human to be exemplary.

And the Major wrote:

We are moving along in much the same old way, cheered by the news that you are happy and well. Sorry that Mayre's water colors have not found the market she expected for them, but she must not be too discouraged with defeat. I have often

found it a spur and a blessing. Remember the precept of the wise Iyeyasu, "If thou knowest what it is to conquer, and knowest not what it is to be defeated, woe unto thee! It will fare ill with thee."

To Caroline he wrote long personal letters. He was interested in all her hopes and ambitions. He wanted to know if she found time to write. To her he commented on books he was reading, sometimes asking her opinion. It was evident, though he himself would have been surprised to have had it suggested, that his hopes centered in her. In one of his letters he said:

You are learning day by day, my dear child, the greatest lesson that life has to teach; the gospel of work. Nothing can take its place; nothing can build and strengthen, endure and satisfy like accomplishment. Do not become discouraged. We learn step by step, bit by bit; stumbling, but to walk better.

Sometimes he would add,

Your dear mother bears up wonderfully in your absence, though I fear she is often lonely. However, we do not complain as long as you both keep well and happy and feel that you are compensated for your own self-denials.

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Caroline often wondered if they were compensated, — she and Mayre. Success seemed so far off. But her courage was indomitable. It flamed above discouragement, a torch to her ambition.

CHAPTER XIII

DISTURBING NEWS

AS the days grew into weeks, Caroline found that her work was wearing and often exacting. She went to the office at a few minutes before nine, remaining until five in the afternoon, with an hour for lunch. While she was interested in her position, and felt that she was gaining experience, there were complications that often made it seem difficult.

Mayre was the most baffling problem. Mayre was homesick; desperately homesick, though she struggled bravely to hide it. She managed splendidly so long as she was busy, but on idle days the bleak garret was unendurable, and Caroline was almost sure to find traces of tears on her flushed face when she returned home.

It was May now. Winter had made its final bow. Over in the Park, flowers had sprung up, and nursemaids in their white caps and aprons wound their way through fragrant paths, chatting as they marshalled their charges.

Sometimes, lonely and unoccupied, Mayre would stroll along the iron fence, longing to get inside and sit for awhile on one of the inviting benches. But the gate was always securely locked.

Standing one day wistfully looking through the iron gates, she was surprised by a pleasant voice at her elbow. She looked up to see a pair of gray-blue eyes smiling at her. A girl of about her own age was fitting a key to the lock.

“Wouldn’t you like to come in with me?” she asked, pushing open the gate and standing aside. “It seems terribly selfish to shut people out, but I suppose the little ruffians on the East Side would soon play havoc if they were once given a free rein.”

Mayre looked up gratefully. Caroline had often warned her about chance acquaintances, but the face bending toward her so graciously was too refined and attractive to mistrust, so she said simply, “You are very kind. I should love to walk a bit. I’ve been cooped up so long.”

They were inside now and the girl started to walk along beside her. Mayre noticed that she was lame, so lame that she walked with painful effort.

It did not take long to learn that Claire Osburn

was from the far West, an artist like herself, who had come to New York to seek fame and fortune.

“I have a little apartment just over there,” she said, waving across the street, “and my ‘art’ has reduced itself to a mere pretense. I always had a knack of printing and rhyming, so when I found my water colors didn’t go here, I began making Christmas and birthday cards. I’ve really done very well. I have my own little clientele — people who are rather exclusive and want something different” — she stopped and flashed a friendly smile — “you know — the ultra kind. I am kept busy with dinner cards, calendars and that sort of thing. I illustrate popular verses too, things like that. It isn’t art really — it’s merely bread and butter.”

“Which is essential to art,” Mayre supplemented.

“Well, yes, rather. I’ve known what it is to work without it — and the work suffers. But I can’t complain. I make ends meet, which is more than lots of girls are doing in New York. I would love to take you over and show you some of my things, if you have time.”

Mayre had ample time, so they strolled across the street, Claire slowly and painfully, and to-

gether they climbed the stairs that led to a wee third-story apartment.

It was a cosy place. A sunny room with a tiny kitchen beyond. In the windows lavender and pink hyacinths were blooming and near by a table held a collection of books and magazines. A tall lamp, with an exquisite parchment shade done in the same lavender and pink tones, and several easy-chairs added an air of comfort.

“ Won’t you let me make you a cup of tea? ” Claire asked, depositing her hat and wrap on a wicker chaise-longue. “ I have some that’s rather good.”

She was gone but a few minutes, bringing back a quaint wooden tray holding two bronze cups with a frieze of wise men in flowing robes.

“ Chinese! ” Mayre exclaimed.

“ San Francisco,” Claire laughed and filled the cups. “ Yes, the tray came from Sing Fat’s. Rather a good one. I hope nobody wants it; you see, I collect things like this — sell them. Sometimes when I get a rare bit it’s very hard to let it go. I have a feeling that this ” — she touched the tray with her tapering fingers caressingly — “ would much rather live with me because I love it, than up on the avenue, where careless servants

slam things about. Notice the design in the handles. Isn't it perfect? Think of the hours some one put upon it. Strange how inanimate things have a way of talking to you. Every time I go into the kitchen this silly thing says, 'hide me! ' "

She threw back her head and laughed softly. "Now tell me about yourself, please. *You* do really worth-while things I am sure."

At the end of an hour Mayre and Claire had formed a friendship that was to mean much to both as the months slipped by.

And down town, in her own busy niche, Caroline was also forming friendships: Elizabeth Worth, the capable girl who served Mr. Morrow in the capacity of secretary, a Wellesley graduate with literary aspirations, who had chosen a publishing house for experience, though, like Caroline, she found little time to exploit her talent. And there was Constance Armstrong, who read proof and sometimes brought her blue pencil over to Caroline's desk for an hour's slaughter; and Rebecca Wineburg with a homely nose and a big brain — the manager's private secretary — who could tell (though of course she didn't) the minutest detail of the enormous business that

went on, and estimate contracts with a finesse that gave her employer pause.

The men too were capable and interesting: Mark Trueman, one of the young intellectuals on the staff, and Rupert Moore in the "Advertising" and Frank Shipman, the red-headed accountant who was often too kind and attentive.

Sometimes there were parties in the evening: dinners uptown followed by dancing. Saturday nights Elizabeth Worth brought her handsome fiancé, a Yale man who had just started to practice law, and Constance Armstrong her engineer brother, and occasionally Rebecca, a man friend who talked a good deal about his success in the clothing business and who wore flashy ties and stickpins. Often Mayre was included and Frank Shipman brought his pal, Sherman Price, as an escort.

Those frolics were happy innovations, though Caroline hated being paired off with Frank, who was inclined to be jocular and familiar. He reminded her of Punny Mathews. He had the same stock of stale jokes, the same aimless line of conversation.

Perhaps the best fun of all was going to the Gymnasium for a swim. Caroline was an expert

in the water, but poor little Mayre, while she wanted to keep up with the rest, shrank from striking out alone. The men, finding that she needed encouragement, got in the habit of pushing her down in the water just to see the bewildered expression on her countenance when she came up. Caroline protested (remembering how she once hated the process) but they were always on hand to see that she was safely rescued, and after all, if Mayre wanted to learn, that was the best way.

As May gave place to June, the attic at Miss Pell's became exceedingly close and stuffy. The skylight was stationary, and the two small windows wholly inadequate for air. Mayre wanted to move. She had learned of a cosy apartment with a key to the Square, in the building where Claire lived, but the rent was fifty dollars.

Caroline considered the proposition thoughtfully. It was not easy to find such a location, and she almost felt that they should take the offered opportunity, but fifty dollars a month!

“ Claire thinks I am almost sure to get that work to do up in Ninety-fifth Street,” Mayre argued, “ and she says the woman pays well. I could stand half the rent — for awhile. And

other things are sure to turn up. Claire says she almost starved the first year she was here — and look now. She's really quite independent.

“ And it wouldn't cost much to move, we are so close,” Mayre went on persuasively, “ and there are those darling cretonnes Alison sent us which we never have been able to use here. I can just see them at the windows — they're to the south, Caroline, did you know that? Claire says it's almost impossible to get such an apartment any more, and the kitchen's just been done over — cutest little box you ever saw with a gas oven where you could make pop-overs — oh, Caroline, don't you think we could possibly squeeze out the money? ”

“ We 'll try, dear,” Caroline promised; “ it would be heated for next winter — and that's an item.”

“ Of course, and Claire would be near when you are away at work. And we wouldn't have Miss Pell spending the evenings with us ——”

“ Honey, I wouldn't speak that way — Miss Pell has been very kind; besides, she's Blair's aunt, and she didn't want to take us in, you remember.”

“ But she does stay so late, Caroline, and I get

worn out, shouting into that black thing. It makes me nervous."

"Did you ever think how it must make her feel?"

Mayre had, and apologized. As Mayre had said, the moving amounted to little, and the tiny new place, once in order, held an atmosphere of home that made her weep.

"If you only knew how it makes me feel, Caroline," she said, trying to brace up. "It's all so sweet and cosy and gay with the cretonnes and the rug Alison sent. It was really nice of her, wasn't it?"

Caroline knew that the things had been discarded by Alison, but she did not mention it. They really were good, and naturally, since Alison had selected them, in excellent taste.

The first month in the apartment was the happiest the girls had known in New York. Mayre had secured her nursery to redecorate, so she was in great spirits.

The evenings were especially enjoyable. Often Claire came in from across the hall with a basket of mending and squeezed in between Caroline and Mayre on the old Kirtley sofa for a chat; or Caroline read aloud, which she loved to do when she

was not too tired, and they would invariably end the evening in the kitchen making sandwiches to eat with the chocolate which Claire brought from her own fireside. "I only have to warm it up," she would insist, when they protested. "Cocoa is never hurt by standing; I made some this morning."

And Claire did many other kind things. She made the shade on the tall lamp (Mayre had rummaged for it in a second-hand store) that stood so bravely behind the couch — "to hide its poor scars," Caroline said; cunning square pillows that matched the window draperies; and she had decorated a pair of wooden book-ends that were so charming in shape and design that Caroline was in terror lest some of Mayre's patrons should some day leave a crisp bill in exchange for them. Altogether it was a cheerful and happy, even companionable household.

But one day (mid-July now) Caroline came home with lagging steps and a face that held a worried expression. Nevertheless she went complacently about the business of cooking dinner, broiling a steak and frying potatoes, washing the crisp lettuce while Mayre made French dressing with imitation oil. It was not until the meal was

over and the dishes washed and put away that she spoke of the news to her sister. Even then she began tactfully.

“ Work at the office is very light these days,” she said; “they tell me that there isn’t much doing during July and August. It’s too hot to work hard, I suppose.”

Mayre lifted her eyes from a linen handkerchief she was embroidering — Claire had found some orders for them — and looked at Caroline thoughtfully.

“ You seem worried,” she remarked, her needle poised for a second.

“ I am, dear, a little.”

“ Nothing’s happened to you? ”

“ Yes — I’m laid off for awhile, Mayre. It’s only temporary, Mr. Morrow says. He wants me back in September.”

“ Caroline! And I urged you to take this place! ”

“ That was all right. I wanted to change. We couldn’t have remained at Miss Pell’s much longer.”

“ It was cheaper.”

“ In a way.”

“ What are we going to do? ”

“ I have a little saved, and there’s Father’s and Tevis’s Christmas checks still in the bank. Not much, but enough to tide us over, I think.”

Mayre put down her sewing and rising, threw an arm about her sister’s shoulder.

“ Don’t worry,” she said. “ There’s my money ——”

“ You must buy clothes ——”

“ Not if we need food and shelter. I don’t care. I would rather live on a crust here than — than dine every night in that attic. I couldn’t stand it any longer, Caroline. The mice for one thing — in spite of Miss Williams — and it was stifling at night ——”

“ I know.”

“ And if worse comes to worst, we can always go home.”

Caroline shook her head.

“ You wouldn’t go? ” Mayre’s blue eyes were round with surprise.

“ No.”

“ Why not? ”

“ I have no right to ask Major to support me when I am well and able-bodied. He gave me an education. That’s all he owes me. But you shall go. You will be a comfort to Mother.”

It was Mayre who now shook her head.

“No — I may be a poor sport,” she said determinedly, “but I shan’t desert. Besides I’m beginning to like it here. I’d miss the noise and bustle, at home. And my work’s coming on. Claire’s been such a help.”

Caroline smiled whimsically. Her eyes had a dreamy, far-away look. Mayre went on with her sewing.

That night, long after Mayre had fallen into a peaceful sleep, Caroline lay awake, scheming and planning. To-morrow she would begin a round of the publishing houses, the larger ones. With her present experience she was not ashamed to ask for work. She had learned a great deal in the past few months; her knowledge ought to be worth something — to somebody.

But apparently it wasn’t. She heard the same thing everywhere. “We are not taking on extra people just now. Come back in the fall.” It began to look very discouraging.

She came home late one sultry afternoon when Mayre’s white face startled her at the door.

“Caroline,” she said, in an awed whisper, “come in quickly! Something dreadful has happened. Blair ——”

Blair, who had been standing near the open window, came forward hastily.

“Can you bear a shock?” he asked.

“Leigh!” she gasped, and sank down into the nearest chair.

“No, thank God, not Leigh,” Blair said fervently. “It’s Alison. Tevis telegraphed me an hour ago. She’s been hurt. I’m afraid fatally — thrown from her horse.”

“Oh, Blair, no, stop! I can’t bear it.”

“Tevis wants Leigh to come, but she cannot; so I fear it must be you, Caroline. They have also telegraphed for your father.”

Caroline rose, and groping her way toward the tiny closet, brought out her small week-end bag. Mayre helped her put underwear and toilet articles into it. “We can send the rest of the things after you, if you have to stay,” she said.

“How soon can I leave, Blair?” She was calm and collected now, directing Mayre with an even voice.

“In thirty minutes if you can make it. I have a taxi below.”

She was quite ready in ten.

“You will keep Mayre with you for the time being?” she asked, as they turned into the hall.

“ Yes; Leigh suggested that. She can close the apartment. You mustn't worry about anything here. You will need your strength — all of it, there.”

He thought how splendid she was as she edged through the crowds and made her way to the train. Quiet, calm and sensible, with a hurt expression in her amber eyes too deep for tears.

“ You will look after Mayre,” she said again, from the steps of the Pullman. “ She has always been so sheltered. I cannot have her staying alone at the apartment.”

“ Please don't worry,” Blair answered. “ I will go back for her now.” She smiled a wan little smile and her hand gripped his. The train moved, glided through the sheds and on, out through the green fields that led toward the South.

Blair had evidently telegraphed the hour of her arrival, for Hudson, the chauffeur, was at the station to meet her the next morning. He raised his cap politely and she noticed that his face was anxious.

“ My sister — she still lives, Hudson? ”

“ Yes, Miss, but —— ” He hesitated as if dreading to alarm her.

“ Yes, go on.”

“ Very bad, ma’am. Very bad. It was an ugly fall. She ——”

He evidently thought better of what he was going to say, and, putting her into the car, closed the door hastily.

At the house, old Peter was out on the veranda steps to welcome her, trying to smile a friendly greeting. His hand shook as he took her bags and followed her to her room above.

“ Marse Tevis, he say he be up soon, Miss Car’line,” he informed her. “ He down in the drawin’-room jes now, talkin’ with the doctors. They done been here all night. I jes sarve ’em coffee. Yes’m. Tur’ble bad business, Miss Car’line, tur’ble bad! ”

Caroline asked no questions. The tears were streaming down old Peter’s face. He shambled from the room weakly, his white head shaking from side to side with grief. She had ample time to freshen up a bit from her journey before Tevis knocked at her door.

She felt afterward that she would scarcely have recognized him had she met him in the street. His face was drawn and white; there was a strange, dazed look in his eyes, totally foreign to his usual

kindliness; a look that was at once sorrowful and bitter. He took her hand listlessly and sank down into a near-by chair.

“Pretty tough blow for you all,” he said, almost below his breath.

“How is she, Tevis? Tell me about it, if you can.”

Like old Peter, he shook his head from side to side, then, resting his arms on his knees, he buried his face in his hands. Caroline went over and knelt beside him, patting him now and then as she would a tired child. Her heart ached so for him. Presently he got up and went uncertainly toward the door. Weakness had overcome him.

“Tevis,” Caroline said quietly, “have you eaten anything? Let us have our coffee together in the breakfast room as we used to do — then, maybe you can talk to me.”

He looked at her dumbly. She slipped her arm through his and led him toward the stairway. Peter busied himself about the table, uncovering the toast as of old, pushing the sputtering percolator in front of Caroline. She poured a cup of coffee and, getting up, took it around to Tevis's place.

“ Please drink it,” she said imploringly. “ You must eat, Tevis: you will need your strength.”

He tried to smile at her but it was a pitiable effort. He took the cup, raised it to his lips and drank mechanically. Peter urged the toast. He refused it. Not a word was exchanged during the five minutes that followed.

Caroline drank her coffee, and hoping to encourage Tevis took several bites of toast.

“ Do you want to see her? ” Tevis asked, coming out of his dreams.

“ Could I? ”

“ She won’t know you. She’s under opiates.”

In the hall, white-robed nurses were passing to and fro. Tevis stopped one. “ Miss Bemus,” he said softly, “ this is Miss Ravenel, Mrs. McElroy’s sister. Take her — up there — with you, please.”

He left them at the door and Caroline followed the nurse.

The room was deathly still, strong with the odor of disinfectants. As Caroline crossed the threshold, a wave of memories swept her. The last time she had entered she had stumbled upon a quarrel; Tevis then was laying down the law regarding Silver Heels. She wondered —

“Over here, Miss Ravenel, and please remain but a moment,” Miss Bemus said. “It is very warm this morning, and we are trying to keep the room as clear as possible.”

With a sinking heart Caroline followed her. She could understand why Tevis had left her at the door when she looked upon her sister's face. Not a scratch marred its beauty; even in the sleep so nearly death it was wondrously fair. The large blue eyes were closed, and long black lashes curled over deep dark circles that but accentuated their beauty; the nose seemed carved of ivory and the lovely mouth ——

It was that, the pathetic mouth, that cut deepest in Caroline's heart. Always those full lips had been red and shapely. Now they were twisted with pain and fatigue; they told of anguish, of fright, untold suffering.

For a moment she stood looking down on her beautiful sister, and tears trickled down her cheeks. Miss Bemus took her hand, led her from the room.

“There is absolutely no hope?” Caroline asked, pausing at the door.

“A bare chance — but, under the circumstance, it will be better if she goes.”

“ You mean —— ”

“ It is her spine, Miss Ravenel. We are waiting for your father’s arrival in the morning — to operate. If she lives until then.”

Caroline returned to her own room. For an hour she paced back and forth. Her thoughts were not with Alison, but with her father; she could see him racing across the country, feel his anguish, his impatience, picture his arrival. She must keep up her strength for that ordeal. She would go with him into that still room, and together they would bend over the broken form shrinking under the satin coverlets — so limp — so limp. She threw herself upon the bed and sobbed as if her heart would break.

A knock brought her to the door. Tevis’s sister stood outside. She, too, seemed crushed and broken, although she had never cared for Alison.

“ Has any one told you how it happened? ” she asked, when they had drawn their chairs to the open window.

“ No.”

“ Can you bear to hear the details, Caroline? ”

“ Go on, please.”

“ It was Silver Heels. Tevis sold him in the

autumn to a man in the city, a horse fancier; but brave as he was, he could not manage the beast. Twice he had thrown him. The news came back to Tevis's club, and some one remarked that Alison was the only person who could conquer the brute. She heard — there are always those who tattle — and sent for the animal. Tevis was not at home."

She threw out her hands in a gesture of despair.

"It happened out here — in the grounds. A woman had not been on the horse for months. He reared and fell back — she was under him ——"

She pointed out the window, to the driveway below.

"There," she said, "there it happened. At her own doorstep. Tevis will never get over it. He blames himself."

"Why?"

"He thinks he should have had the horse shot — he was never safe. But it seemed so cruel — and the new owner was a man — a man who knew horses."

Caroline had sat white and still through the recital. Now she rose.

"Will you walk with me for awhile?" she

asked plaintively. "I feel as if these rooms would stifle me."

Together they went down into the park that stretched in a green meadow away from the house.

The dreaded hour came at last. Caroline met her father at the station. Tevis had not left the house since his return to it a few hours after the accident.

Caroline had expected to see the Major worn and broken after his long, depressing trip, but she was agreeably surprised. He was weary, yet keen and alert.

"She still lives?" he asked hopefully.

"Yes; but is very low, Major."

They were in the limousine when he spoke again. His tone was anxious, but wholly professional.

"They have not operated?"

"No; they are waiting for you."

He did not ask for particulars; he settled back in the car, his fine brows drawn together in thought, his eyes deep in meditation.

She watched him a few minutes later. He had taken but a moment to refresh himself, to scrub

his long thin fingers and immaculate nails as she had seen him do so often before an operation. Then a nurse brought him a surgeon's robe, and with the attending physician, he entered Alison's room.

Tense as the situation was, she gave him an admiring glance as he passed through the door that led to the chamber beyond. There was always something superhuman about him in that robe. He seemed more than a man; all but divine. He was so silent that she felt he must be praying.

She went with him to the bedside, saw him turn back the covers, saw him straighten for a moment, then bend over the crumpled form before him. How could she for a moment have doubted him. Delicately, knowingly, those slender wise fingers began their search.

How marvelous he was. Not a trace of feeling, scarcely a glance at the ivory face on the pillow. He was not a father now. He was a surgeon!

A nurse led her from the room. Later there were soft footsteps through the halls. Caroline knew what was happening without being told. They were taking in a table — in Alison's room — a long table.

The interminable minutes dragged themselves

by. She wondered if Tevis were in there. Surely they would not permit him; it would be too cruel. Restless, anguished with suspense, she went into his den. At first she thought it empty; then she discovered him. He had thrown himself across a couch, his head in the pillows.

She went over to him, gently, and laid a hand on his shoulder. He jumped up wildly.

“I wanted to stay,” he said, “but your father thought best——” He did not finish the sentence, but she understood.

“You could do no good, Tevis. She would not know.”

She left him alone. Hours later, some one rapped on her own door. It was the physician who had so long attended Tevis’s people.

She brought him into the room and stood breathless, awaiting his news.

“I am sorry to hurt you,” he said kindly, “but your sister is gone.” He paused for a second. “Your father was — magnificent, but it was too late.”

She scarcely knew how she got through the night. Her father had gone to his own room. She tried his door once. It was locked.

It was well on in the next day when she saw

him, and his eyes made her cry out. He had aged so during that long vigil. He seemed to have wasted away, and the old cough had come back. It racked him when he tried to speak to her.

“Has a wire been sent to Mother?” she asked.

He bowed his head. “Yes — last night. It was the hardest task — save one — that I have ever performed.”

CHAPTER XIV

A VISITOR FROM CALIFORNIA

THE days that followed Alison's death were each a separate agony to Caroline. Although Tevis's mother and sister lived so near, he clung to her for strength and comfort. She went about the house quietly, getting things in order. She understood his moods, never bothering him with useless questions. With the help of old Peter and Abbie, she sorted and packed Alison's clothes and personal belongings. Tevis insisted that they should be divided among Alison's sisters, equally, if such a thing were possible.

Cousin Eliza left her own home and took the room next to Caroline's, lending what assistance she could, but Cousin Eliza was getting old and feeble, and the shock of her young niece's death had left her in a more or less dazed condition.

But one ray of light pierced the gloom of those sad days. It was shortly after Alison went that Mayre's special delivery letter came. It was brief but cheering.

“ Leigh’s precious baby, a little girl, was born this morning. It is a typical Ravenel, and she has named it for you — Caroline.”

In spite of the load she was carrying, Caroline found herself going about with a lightened heart when she thought of Leigh cuddling that baby in her arms. And to think she had named it for her. She wrote back, “ You are taking a great chance, Leigh dear, to put such a hoodoo upon her, knowing my reputation for naughtiness. Let us hope that she will be a counterpart in ‘Ravenel’ only.”

Doctor Ravenel had gone home almost immediately. His practice demanded a quick return, and the effects of a low altitude were always hard upon him. But Caroline had found several opportunities to walk and talk with him after the first great shock of Alison’s going was over. His bits of home news were reassuring. They were getting along nicely at the Abbey, a little lonely at times — He had stopped there, thinking no doubt of the effect Alison’s death would have upon her mother.

Caroline asked for Mrs. Ludlow, and of his own accord, the Major spoke of Jimmy.

“ He has a brilliant future,” he said with

affection. "But he works too hard." That was all, but Caroline hung on the words.

And later a note came from Jimmy, merely a line, but it said more than most thickly packed letters:

"My sorrow for you and yours is too deep for words. You have my sympathy — and my love, always."

That note went about with Caroline as she performed the last sad rites in Alison's home. When sorrow overcame her, as it so often did, she took it out and read it, going on with her duties sustained and encouraged.

She had an unanticipated visit one morning shortly before she left for New York. Fleming DeCoursey called. He was exceedingly sympathetic, too much so, she thought, for a mere acquaintance. He talked of Alison for some time — her beauty, her graciousness, her splendid gift for entertaining. Caroline listened patiently.

"Writing any plays now?" he asked rather solicitously.

"No — I have had little time for that sort of thing in New York. I have been too busy earning my living."

"I shall be in New York this autumn," he said.

“If I can be of assistance to you, call upon me. I happen to know some of the producers there — theatrical managers.”

Caroline thanked him and thought little about his offer.

But the mere suggestion of writing stirred her dormant brain. That night as she lay awake (she had formed the unpleasant habit since coming South) old plots sailed before her sleepless eyes. But she would have none of them. Her play — the big one she was to produce — must be entirely original. Something dramatic; something that would pull at the heart strings; something that would show struggle and defeat; ultimate triumph.

She scarcely knew when the real clew came to her. It was several nights after DeCoursey's call, but it came, clear and vibrant in her puzzled brain, pushing away the cobwebs, stamping out grief, filling her whole being with inspiration and promise.

She got up — it was in the small hours of morning, and hastily donning a bath robe, wrote feverishly. The sun was streaming in the east window when she finished, her plot blocked, her stage set.

Limp and exhausted, she crept back to bed and slept until well into the afternoon.

She wondered when she went over the work later, why her plot had not come to her before. She went back step by step, remembering the most trivial incident contributing to it, trying to segregate unimportant events from potential ones. She wondered why she, and not Mayre, had gone to the candy-box house in Fifty-seventh Street that blustery March morning nearly six months before; wondered if the pathetic child that had made such a lasting impression upon her mind had been led into her presence by the hand of fate — for he was her hero — her play: that little boy with his handsome head bent over an imaginary sand pile. She saw him as an infant, lying in his bassinet smothered with luxurious coverings in his expensive crowded nursery; saw his struggle for air and sunshine, for self-mastery, self-expression, and always, just behind him, ready to pull him back, to strangle hope, joy and imagination, his mother's hand, reaching, thwarting —

That hand became a clutch, a vice that held him. It pushed him in a treadmill — a groove. A groove! Her busy mind grasped at the word,

played with it, resolved it into a title: "Grooved."

She could see it on headlines in newspapers; blazed in shimmering electric lights on Broadway.

"Grooved." A gripping play, by a new playwright, Caroline Ravenel.

In saner minutes she laughed at her egotism, her presumption; how absurd she was! And yet she plodded on.

September found her back in the apartment opposite the Square. The weather was perfect; soft golden weather with fresh breezes floating in from the river. She plunged into the business of polishing her play, working early and late.

But the need of money made her put it aside. She went down to the publishing house one morning and asked for Mr. Morrow. He seemed glad to see her, offered her her old place at an increase of salary. Then the grind began again; there was little time for creative work.

She took a Saturday afternoon off now and then and went to a matinee, alone, sitting in the second balcony where the seats were cheap, drinking in the performance with hungry eyes; watch-

ing the technique, the scene shifting, the stage settings, absolutely lost to her surroundings.

Mayre and Claire had become fast friends. They spent their spare moments together, often at the Metropolitan, standing for hours before pictures, or strolling through the Park in the autumn sunshine. Mayre was happier now, rounder and more contented. She had matured slowly, but all at once she seemed to blossom; her eyes beneath a blue velvet turban were as soft and sweet as violets. She was always becomingly gowned and she had an air of distinction.

“Any one would know that Mayre was an artist, just to look at her,” Claire often remarked. “She looks the part — and is so pretty.”

Pretty, perhaps, just described her. She had none of Caroline’s beauty. She was little and round and lovable, — like Leigh’s baby girl, Caroline sometimes thought when she looked at her.

Caroline came home from work late one afternoon to find her unusually animated. She had dressed in a little white organdy with sprigs of heliotrope, belted at the waist with a velvet sash. It deepened her eyes to an evening blue, soft as twilight.

“You never in the world could guess who called this afternoon,” she cried, when she spied Caroline. “I’ll give you three guesses.”

Caroline’s heart leaped to her throat. Her thoughts raced to Jim.

“Not Eunice Middleton?” Eunice was an unwise rich girl whom Caroline had once befriended and who was always doing unexpected things.

“No.”

“Nor Margaret McIntosh — of course not!”

“No — but you are getting warmer. It’s a native son ——”

“Biddy Webster!”

“Yes; and oh, Caroline, he’s so good-looking!” A crimson blush suffused Mayre’s face, and her dimples came and went.

“I am sorry to miss him.”

“Don’t worry; he’s coming back — he’s invited us to dinner — at the Plaza! Imagine. That’s why I am all dressed up. He’d wild to see you. He’s bringing a friend with him. A Californian, in business here.”

“A Californian — settled in New York! Mayre, your ears deceived you.”

“That is what Biddy said — one of his old pals at Berkeley. Stephen — somebody.”

“ Not Stephen Raybourn? ”

“ Yes, that was the name. Do you know him? ”

“ Very well. It will be pleasant to see him again.”

Although Caroline was very tired, she took a good deal of pains with her toilet that night. Her hair, brushed until it shone like satin, seemed unusually beautiful as she knotted it low on her neck, and a string of oriental beads that went about her throat twice and fell below her waist lent color to the black velvet gown she had so long worn for best. There were innumerable things of Alison's she might have used, beautiful gowns which it seemed almost a shame to lay away, but she could not bring herself to touch them.

She took a long, lingering look in her mirror when she had finished. Would Biddy think her changed? Susan Stirling had started when she met her. She had exclaimed that she was so thin, adding a compliment to hide her confusion. And since that time — she had suffered so. Grief had an ugly habit of bestowing lines.

She took a hand mirror and held it close. Yes, there were crow's feet coming, but so indistinct that they were scarcely visible. Perhaps Biddy

would not look too close. Men were apt to accept the *tout ensemble*.

But her eyes were large and brilliant and her smile cordial when she met him in the living room. The light from the rose shade had a complimentary effect and Biddy's "Whew! This is great, Caroline!" as he took her hand, encouraged her.

"It's great to see you too, Biddy. You're like a streak of sunshine after your California fog!"

It was very pleasant after the strain of the past few months to put cares and work aside and dine quietly with old friends. Biddy, like all Westerners, had spared no pains to make the occasion an event. The table, set cosily for four in a far corner, was bright with flowers, and there were boutonnières for her and Mayre, cunning little rosebuds with tiny quivering ferns that made her think of other days; dinners at the St. Francis, when Biddy had donned his evening clothes, and she her prettiest dancing frock. How happy she had been! For a moment she was far away, living again those care-free days.

She raised her eyes to see Biddy's fixed upon her. They held a strange, wondering expression.

The four fell into easy conversation. The

music, just far enough away to be unobtrusive, fell pleasantly upon their ears. Once Biddy looked up. "Remember that, Caroline? You know we danced to it at the 'Frantic,' the night Sid Anderson took your roommate." He turned his head to listen, beating the time softly with his spoon.

He too remembered those nights. She almost wished he had not; it was all so futile, his caring for her. She knew now. Something told her that it could never be Biddy, and yet she liked him — so much.

Dinner over, Biddy suggested a light opera, and drew forth the tickets. Evidently he had not heard of their loss, and she dreaded to break in upon his happiness by telling him of Alison's death. There was no place for grief at a feast. It would be much easier to go than to explain. She had her own ideas about mourning, anyway; there was a duty to the living. She had spent no time in useless sorrow, made no change in her attire. She had never approved of parading grief. Death was a natural consequence of life. There was something about wearing black that revolted her.

In the theater she found herself next to Steve

Raybourn. She fancied that Biddy was a little disappointed, but he chatted with Mayre. It was not until they reached her apartment that Biddy spoke to her alone. Mayre had gone on in, discreetly leaving them alone in the hall.

“ When may I see you, Caroline? ”

“ Any evening, Biddy. Mayre and I are always here. Come up.”

He seemed disappointed. “ Will you go with me to the Follies to-morrow night? ”

She hesitated but a second. “ You haven't heard, Biddy, but — we have had a loss; my sister Alison died very recently. I —— ”

He was quick to apologize. “ Pardon me, I didn't know —— ”

“ Of course you didn't. It was very sudden. An accident.” She changed the subject quickly. “ Suppose you and Steve have dinner with us some night,” she suggested. “ I'll cook it.”

He looked a bit incredulous. One scarcely connected Caroline Ravenel with culinary art.

“ It would be very pleasant.”

“ Pop-overs are my specialty. Do you like them? ”

Biddy looked puzzled.

“ Beefsteak, pop-overs, and French fried po-

tatoes! And Mayre makes wonderful salad — with imitation oil.” She was as delightfully honest as of old.

“It sounds mighty fine. When could we arrange this party?”

“Any time. Let’s see. This is Wednesday. How about Saturday? I’m free in the afternoon.”

“Could I come a little early?”

“Surely. I’ll put an apron on you and let you peel potatoes and grapefruit.”

He was halfway down the stairs when she called to him softly.

“Oh, Biddy, you don’t know any more Cal men here, do you? Because if you do, I’ll ask Susan Stirling and a friend of Mayre’s across the hall. We could all have such fun together.”

Biddy did not seem particularly thrilled, but he answered pleasantly, “You can always find Cal people anywhere. I’ll do my best.”

Saturday dawned bright and clear. Caroline arrived home soon after lunch to find that Claire and Mayre had already set the table, dressing the center with Biddy’s flowers (blue and gold) which had arrived earlier in the day. Susan came in presently, looking almost stunning in a new afternoon gown. Caroline could scarcely repress a

smile as she glanced at her. Below a dainty silken frock Susan's heavy walking boots, muddy from a previous day's tramp, protruded boldly. There was always something wrong with Susan's attire.

She caught Caroline's smile and said. "I suppose I should have changed my shoes, but I was in such a rush to get here and help you; besides, I loathe those high-heeled, thin-soled, make-believe things people are wearing. I always feel as if I were going to pitch forward and scrape my nose on the sidewalk. What can I do to help?"

"You may go into my closet and find a pair of black satin pumps with silver buckles and put them on, *instantly*!" Caroline said with erstwhile authority. "You can't wear tan boots with a silk gown, Susan. It isn't done."

"But the heels, Cal, dear."

"They're only medium."

Biddy was a "piker," Caroline said, when she greeted him at six o'clock. The potatoes were peeled, and the grapefruit was in the icebox awaiting Mayre's magic touch in the salad. Besides Steve, Biddy had brought Billy Alexander, whom Caroline had never met. They were a man short, but Caroline took Claire under her wing

and steered the conversation in her direction. Altogether it was a successful party.

Biddy remained in New York a month. Sometimes Caroline came home in the late afternoon to find that he had dropped in for a chat with Mayre; she usually found them side by side on the sofa, in animated conversation, Mayre rosy and entertaining Biddy amused and affable.

“ I suppose he thinks I am next best,” Mayre would sometimes remark, watching her sister’s face closely, “ but it seems a shame not to entertain him, when he’s in New York just to have a good time.”

Once Caroline accepted his invitation to lunch during her hurried noon hour. Biddy, who was accustomed to his own time on his California fruit farm, rather resented her haste. She kept consulting her wrist watch.

“ But I have only one hour, Biddy,” she reminded him, when he complained.

Again she caught the look that had surprised her the night of his arrival. He leaned over the table and spoke earnestly.

“ You don’t mind if I say something Caroline —— ”

“ No, certainly not.”

“ If you don't stop this grind, you're going to end in a regular blue stocking, one of these woman's rights —— ”

“ Do I look feministic, Biddy? ”

“ A little,” he confessed.

She laughed. “ You should see me at the office — in my horn-rimmed glasses.”

“ I'm glad I can't.”

“ Am I so bad as that? ”

“ Men don't like strong-minded women, Caroline.”

“ How do they like them, Biddy? ”

“ Dependent, Caroline. It was meant to be that way.”

“ Was it really? ” She laughed her low musical laugh.

“ But if she had to be — to use her mind? Or would you advise letting it atrophy? ”

Biddy's face flushed.

“ You've changed a lot since the old days,” he said abruptly, and picked up the waiter's check. They parted in front of her office.

“ See you soon again? ” she asked, holding out a friendly hand.

“ If you have the time,” he answered, looking long into her golden eyes.

Before she turned, she said whimsically, "I wish you had Emma here." Emma was Biddy's automobile. "Oh, Biddy, what splendid times we had with her. Do you remember the night after the Alpha Delt Formal, when she needed a drink? You couldn't find any water, so you took the punch that was left, heaps of it, and gave it to her. How she did caper and skid going home ——"

"You still think of those days, Caroline?"

"Surely. Don't you? Please excuse me, Biddy. There goes my boss. I can't let him beat me to work. See you soon. Thanks for an awfully good lunch."

Several days passed. She met him one Saturday afternoon as she was leaving the office. It was strange that in all that jam she should have chanced upon him. She had a suspicion that he was watching for her.

"Are you going home?" he asked, almost wistfully. It was a heavenly afternoon, warm and mellow.

"Yes."

"Don't; come with me."

"Where, Biddy?"

"Anywhere."

“ You are not lonesome? ”

He turned upon her quickly. “ What do you suppose I came to New York for? ” He did not give her time to answer. “ Will you ride through the Park if I call a taxi? ”

“ The bus is much nicer. We'll get atop and I'll show you the residences on Fifth Avenue. I've learned them by heart.”

“ You'll go, then? ”

“ Of course I will.”

The bus was crowded. They climbed the stairs and lurched into a seat, laughing and talking. But after awhile conversation palled. Caroline blamed herself. She had such a poor stock of small talk, and Biddy wanted to be entertained.

They left the bus and strolled through the Park. Conversation still lagged. Awkward pauses crept in. For awhile the squirrels interested them; Caroline liked to play with them, coaxing them close beside her. She was conscious that Biddy was watching her from the corner of his eye.

Finally he burst out, “ What's the matter, Caroline? We can't get back on the old ground. You seem so — so much stiffer — and older.”

She wanted to say, “ And you so much younger,

Biddy," but she did not. Instead she smiled into his clouded eyes.

"I was afraid you would discover that," she admitted, making a little hole in the sand with her low flat heel.

"Discover what?"

"That I am older. I am."

"What makes you?"

"Work, and care, and grief — they aren't the very best playfellows."

"That's just the point," he blurted out. "What the dickens do you do it for — stay on here like this?"

She raised her amber eyes and looked at him. "Can anybody get anywhere without working?" she asked.

"No, but ——"

"It's chasing the thing you want that's fun, Biddy, like following a butterfly. It's the running — out in the sunshine — thinking you've almost got it and then stumbling — and picking yourself up again. It's *life*, don't you see — that chase? It would be deadly without it."

"You're a funny girl," he said, staring at her as if she had turned a new side to him. "If it's

chasing butterflies you want, come to California — to my ranch. The woods are full of them.”

She shook her head sadly. Her point had gone straight over Biddy's near-curly head.

“ How long could *you* stand this sort of thing? ” she asked, nodding back to the city. “ Entertainment. You're fed up on loafing, now.”

“ Men have to work. That's their business — so that you women can chase your butterflies.”

She got up and put on her hat, which she had taken off to get the breeze, and slipped her loose working gloves over her slender fingers.

“ Biddy,” she said, “ let's be frank. I told you two years ago that we couldn't get very far together. We don't see things in the same way. I release you from all your promises. You've been very patient.”

She thought his eyes cleared; he seemed relieved, if anything.

“ I guess the trouble is, you are a little beyond my depth, Caroline. I never *could* get these brainy women —— ” He ran his hand across his brow as if he were clearing it of something that confused him.

They got on better after that. The road home seemed much shorter than it had coming out.

Biddy was cheerful. He acted as if a load had been lifted. Caroline wondered.

She came home one evening a week later to find Mayre drooping. Nothing seemed to be the matter. She was just tired. She had been helping Claire in the morning. In the afternoon she and Biddy had taken a long walk.

“He goes away next week, you know,” Mayre volunteered. “He says he has had a wonderful time. I suppose Steve’s being here helped a lot.”

Caroline began busying herself in the kitchen.

“I was just thinking,” came Mayre’s low voice from the living room, “that it would be so nice to have some sort of a send-off for him. A party or something — just a simple one. What would you think of getting the crowd together (that meant the office force) and going to the Gym, with a little supper here afterward.”

“I think it would be great fun. Get it up.”

“Will you ask the girls?”

Caroline promised gladly.

She saw Biddy once in the interim; he was saying good-by to Mayre and Claire in front of the apartment. They had been on some kind of a jaunt together. He was rather long in making his adieus. Mayre was as pretty as the roses she

had carelessly thrust through her coat. Biddy was responsible for them, Caroline knew. Like all Californians, he was exceedingly fond of flowers.

It was a happy, responsive crowd that stormed the gymnasium on Friday night. Caroline had asked all her young friends: Constance Armstrong and Elizabeth Worth and their escorts; Rebecca Wineburg and her young clothier, festive in his flaming ties. Claire had come too, although she could not swim. Caroline begged to sit with her in the gallery above the pool and watch the others, but Claire would not allow it.

Caroline could not help thinking how charming Mayre was as she emerged from the dressing room in her blue bathing suit, cunning cap and slippers. Her eyes were almost black with excitement, and her dimples came and went bewitchingly. She saw Biddy take her hand and pull her to the very edge of the pool; saw Mayre shrink back as she always did, dreading the first plunge.

"You have to do this," Frank Shipman said in his boisterous way, and gave her the customary push, plunging in after her.

Caroline saw Biddy frown and follow her; then

they all plunged and swam across the wide stretch of water, laughing and sputtering.

There was a good half-hour's frolic. Mayre was keeping up with the others bravely, but looking a little tired, Caroline thought, swimming past her. They were all making for the far side of the pool for a last race back.

"Don't overdo, honey," she called, and Mayre smiled, shaking her head.

They all started, there was the customary "Hoop-la!" the swift striking out, each one for himself. Biddy was swimming close to Caroline, neck to neck, with swift sure strokes, gaining upon her just enough to make him jubilant.

As they neared the goal, she made a sudden sprint and shot past him, laughing as she ran up the steps that led to the dressing rooms beyond.

Biddy turned and looked back. The crowd was still coming, laughing and shouting.

"Where's Mayre?" he asked and strained his eyes out over the pool.

Frank Shipman was climbing the stairs; he also turned and looked.

"She started with us," he said.

Caroline gave a startled cry. Biddy and Frank jumped back into the water, swimming furiously.

A hush fell over the crowd. A pool guard sprang from the side coping and swam quickly toward the center.

Caroline stood rooted to the spot, scarcely breathing; her eyes never left him. Presently he went under. When he came up he was holding something with one arm, swimming with the other.

Caroline plunged into the water and swam toward him. Some one tried to turn her around, but she fought like a maddened thing. "Let me go, don't touch me! It's Mayre! Mayre ——" Her voice ended in a broken cry.

Yet she was almost the first to reach Mayre's side. They had brought her up on the coping where she lay face down, an arm under her throat, her head turned to one side. Already the guard was beginning his careful, methodical manipulations, slowly, skilfully.

But Mayre, white and silent, made no response.

Caroline scarcely knew how she lived through that night. For what seemed hours Biddy and the attendant bent over the silent little form spread on the hard cement floor, working valiantly, never for a moment losing hope, assuring Caroline over and over again that there was a spark of life, — that surely and gradually Mayre was

being resuscitated, would look up at them presently with her old smile.

Caroline crouched beside her, as close as the physician would permit, praying, praying.

But Mayre did not wake up and smile, not even at the hospital where she lay (breathing now) in a little white bed, Biddy on one side, Caroline on the other, holding tightly to her hand. Once when the nurse left the room and Caroline looked away for a moment, she saw him lean over and leave a kiss on the dark wavy hair, that spread, wet and tangled, on the white pillow. Her eyes caught his as she turned.

“You must know how I feel about her, Caroline,” he said, trying to straighten out the tangles. “I wasn’t sure until to-night — then I knew.”

Caroline went around to the other side of the cot and took Biddy’s hand in a strong clasp.

“I am so glad,” she said, and sobs gripped her. “I think she will be happy when she knows.”

Towards morning Leigh and Blair came and Caroline went away to rest. Biddy stayed on, until the morning sunshine streamed into the pleasant room, and Mayre did look up and smile

— radiantly — when she saw him looking down at her.

It was several days before she was back again in the apartment. Leigh and Blair brought her home in the little “Lizzie,” almost smothered with Biddy’s flowers, bouquets and blooming things that had helped her to get well.

Biddy’s stay in New York lengthened. One day he came to Caroline as she was leaving the office, and begged that he might be allowed to take Mayre home with him.

“We will be married without any fuss,” he said, “perhaps at old Trinity. Mayre rather favors that. Then go straight to the ranch. There, with old Sing to wait upon her, and little Chan to make her comfortable, she will soon be herself again.”

Caroline had a vision of that quaint old house tucked away between sun-tipped hills, and gave her consent gladly. “We must wire Mother and Major,” she said, “that is all.”

So it was arranged; quietly, as Biddy had hoped, without fuss, and little Mayre went away, happy and content.

She clung to Caroline for a moment at the station with tears in her eyes.

“ It is going to be so hard for you all alone,” she whispered, “ but you will have Leigh — and Claire is so near. I shall write to you very often, twice a week anyway, especially after we have seen father and mother. Are there any messages? ”

“ My dearest love to both.”

“ And Jimmy? ”

“ Tell him that I am well — if he asks — and busy.” She clipped the last word a little and turned back toward the lights of the city.

CHAPTER XV

MR. DECOURSEY OFFERS HELP

THE months that followed Mayre's going were simple drudgery, with few bright spots. Work at the office increased. Caroline's general knowledge and added experience soon put her into a more professional realm. Her hours, while not longer, were harder, more solidly packed with difficult, painstaking work. More and more Mr. Morrow depended upon her skill and judgment.

"I hope I am not putting too much upon you, Miss Ravenel," he would say kindly, "but — that story; I want your ideas about it. Good stuff, it seems to me. Take it home to-night, if you don't mind."

That meant reading and taking notes until the small hours of morning as Caroline was always thorough and faithful.

And sometimes it was, "Don't like to ask you, Miss Ravenel, but if you could give Miss Norton a couple of hours this evening. She wants to go

over those special articles we are running; rather a big job for her.”

Of course she gave the time gladly. It all meant experience, and that was what she wanted; but it also meant a loss of strength and vitality. There were changes in the office too. New people were coming in, old going out. Rebecca Wineburg, much to her employer's disgust, had married her prosperous young clothier.

“ You, with your fine mind,” the manager had said, “ marrying, and settling down into a housewife! It's a shame! ”

And Rebecca had answered shrewdly, “ I might use some of my ability helping Abe in his business. I shan't sit down rocking myself in a chair all morning, nor spend the days cooking either. I will keep Abe's books, and pulling together, we will lay by a little something — maybe much.”

“ It will be much, I have no doubt, Miss Wineburg,” her employer had smilingly answered.

Elizabeth Worth had married her young lawyer. They had a cosy apartment to which Caroline was occasionally invited to dinner that Elizabeth cooked to perfection.

Sometimes Caroline watched her presiding over

immaculate linen and sparkling silver, her face rosy and content. She had lost that strained, careworn look she had carried about her business. She seemed younger, more alert, far more interesting and entertaining. She had time for wider reading; for the best matinees; occasional lectures. Once she brought out a story she had found time to write, and Caroline went over it with her, pointing out the places where she thought it might be improved.

Sometimes after those visits Caroline lay awake into the night, thinking, wondering, almost planning, but morning found her at her desk again, up to her eyes in the day's responsibilities.

There was one diversion that never failed to bring her peace and happiness. Those were the hours spent in Leigh's nursery with her namesake. Little Carol was developing rapidly, a charming bit of humanity with Caroline's own luminous eyes and nut-brown complexion, a wee gypsy thing, cuddly and lovable.

"She is a Ravenel, isn't she!" Caroline would exclaim, tucking her in her arms for a nap, singing to her from Maumy's old store of lullabys. Sometimes Leigh would find them there long after little Carol should have been in her crib, the older Caro-

line still humming lightly, looking out into the twilight with starry eyes.

The apartment seemed unusually desolate after those week-ends. They were an established habit now, as Leigh insisted upon at least two days out of the seven. Caroline had her own little room in the third story, a restful place with its quaint strips of rag carpet, pink and gray; its high poster bed and ruffled white curtains. On Sunday mornings Caroline sometimes had her breakfast there. Alice brought it up. The service alone made her hungry. Coffee in a blue and white pot, with its mate, the spouty pitcher, steaming with hot water beside it; golden waffles and honey; thick cream for her coffee and baked apple. Alice would make a pretense of tidying up the room (while Caroline scrambled into a kimono) shaking up the pillows on the wide bed, spreading out the morning papers, illustrations up.

And Caroline would lie there long after the water had cooled in the quaint pitcher, listening to the church bells pealing in the village beyond, waiting for Alice to bring up the baby (all warm and rosy from her bath) for a morning kiss and pat-a-cake before she went to sleep. Those were

ideal Sundays. It was always a little hard to plunge into the grind afterward.

And there was still so little time for original work. The play — the one that was to make such a name for its author — lay at the bottom of a drawer, sadly in need of mending. There was one scene that refused to move, try as Caroline would to make it. The characters balked. It was queer about those brain children, she sometimes thought. They had such definite ideals about their own affairs. She wished she could get some expert advice upon it, but she scarcely knew where to turn.

One evening, quite unexpectedly, help came. On a wet blustery evening in the late spring, some one set the apartment bell to jangling. It rang so persistently that although Caroline was very tired, she was forced to answer. Fleming DeCoursey stood outside, wet from the spring drizzle. She brought him in and made him comfortable. He was very agreeable, and after a few minutes visiting asked about Caroline's play.

"It isn't quite ready to offer yet," she said, a trifle discouraged.

"What's the matter?"

“ It’s the third act. My climax. It has never suited me.”

“ May I see it? I hesitate to say that I may be of service —— ”

“ Oh, I am quite sure you could be, only I wish it to be all my own.”

“ But a mere suggestion.”

“ Yes, a suggestion might help.” She got it out and brought it to him.

“ Read it to me,” he said, leaning back on the comfortable sofa preparatory to a pleasant hour.

“ You really wish to hear it? ”

“ Every word.”

Caroline set the tall lamp closer, so that its rosy light fell comfortably over her shoulder, and began. Naturally an excellent reader, and with a voice as flexible and rich as any he had ever heard, it was little wonder that Fleming DeCoursey sat through the recital scarcely moving a muscle, entranced and entertained.

She was a lovely sight as she sat there; the lines of her slender body fading into the velvet softness of the old wing chair, her head beautifully poised, her intelligent, luminous eyes glowing and filling with emotion as she read. Sometimes

she stopped and paused for better self-control, to say, a little ashamed:

“ You see how silly I am about it — it always affects me — it's so much a part of me,” and DeCoursey let her pause merely long enough to add, half under his breath, “ Go on, please; it is most interesting.”

When she had quite finished he leaned over and took the yellow sheets from her hand (it had never been copied) and turning several pages swiftly, became engrossed in what he read.

“ It has large possibilities,” he said presently. “ I think if you would permit me to live with it for a few days, I could suggest what you want.”

Caroline looked at the yellow sheets with maternal eyes. DeCoursey seemed rather eager.

“ I assure you it will have the best of care.”

“ It would not be wise to show it to any one — yet.”

“ Certainly not, Miss Ravenel. I understand the dangers of plagiarism as well as you.”

She took the manuscript and looked at it intently for a moment, then, with a little gesture wholly appealing, put it into his hands much as she would have laid an infant there.

“ I should like it back soon — that is, as soon as

you find it convenient. And I very much appreciate your interest. Please don't hesitate to make suggestions. I can't promise to take them, but I will consider them."

He smiled and made his adieus. Two days later the manuscript was returned. There were not many suggestions, only some along the margin where Caroline herself had been in doubt.

Mr. DeCoursey explained. "It really is very good as it is. I should advise you to put it aside for a few months and get a new light upon it. That always helps. The thing you want will no doubt come to you. As I said before, potentially it is a play—a very good one. A bit"—he shrugged his narrow, drooping shoulders—"amateurish as yet, but that is merely the fault of youth and inexperience, not talent. You show splendid ability."

Caroline pondered over his remarks long after he had gone. She almost wished she had not let him have the play. His comments seemed stilted and trivial. Young and inexperienced as she was, she knew good work when she saw it. That was a part of her business at the publishing house.

Weeks passed. Now and then Caroline took out the play and worked over it, but either be-

cause she was so tired at night, or not yet strong enough in dramatic force, it still refused to move. As Mr. DeCoursey had suggested, she put it away to ripen, and busied herself about other things.

Spring passed. June came in romping, like a merry restless child bestowing gifts. Out Leigh's way trees misted in vistas of green; robins sang as they built their nests in apple and cherry trees, and 'Baby Carol laughed and clapped her hands when they ventured near her cart in quest of crumbs.

Caroline still spent her Saturdays and Sundays with Leigh. It was an established custom. She had grown to love the little room under the eaves too warm for comfort now, so she had taken a cot at night on the little sleeping porch beyond. She was comfortable there, but the clear stars twinkling in the heavens, the pale white moon, the swaying trees below, sometimes kept her awake until late. There was so much to think about.

Mayre's letters were a little disturbing. She had written:

I really think, Caroline dear, that you ought to come home next winter if possible. Mother is failing. I am so sorry to tell you, but you would hardly forgive me if I kept it from you. She

will never get over Alison's death. I have sometimes thought she loved her best of all. She was so proud of her marriage into the McElroy family — and of her position in the South. Mother, you know, is, and ever will be, a true aristocrat. She and Father both seemed to enjoy the two weeks' stay with us at Christmas, but were more or less restless and anxious to get back home. Doesn't it seem dreadful to think that out of five children — daughters too — poor Mother has not one to comfort her? I do so wish that Father would consider coming over here. Biddy, who simply adores him, has offered him an acre at the far end of the ranch to build a comfortable cottage, but Father will not give up his practice yet. Perhaps in time —

And there was other news:

I was in San Francisco the other day and in Powell Street happened to glance up to one of the skyscrapers, and what do you think I saw blazoned on a window there: "Margaret McIntosh, Attorney at Law!" It gave me such a thrill that I ran up for a moment. She was busy, but took time to tell me all about it — her success, and sent you oceans of love. She told me of Eunice Middleton, too. Says she is graduating this year with honors. Imagine! Says she has grown into a really fine girl with high ideals. But of course you know all about her since she is your own protégé and no doubt writes often.

I also had another delightful experience in the

city. Ran into Jim Ludlow at Tait's where Biddy and I were having our weekly dinner, and movie afterward. That's our dissipation; we get heaps of fun out of it. Jim was with a party. Seemed to be having a good time. Father told me at Christmas that Jim won a case in the Supreme Court not long ago and that it was a great feather in his cap. He was as handsome as ever (I always thought he was, though you rather dislike the word) and a very pretty young woman at his left was making a desperate effort to entertain him. I thought he seemed preoccupied. Father says he is a slave to business.

There were other letters. Betty Warren wrote:

For heaven sake, Cal, how long does it take to get a career going? You have been away almost two years and although I read the *Times* from cover to cover I can't find a word about your plays. What's the matter? I really think that you ought to come home if only to see Junior. Every one says he is the finest specimen (by the way, how is dear old Susan? Was awfully interested in your news of her) of a two-year-old they ever saw. Stan is simply wild about him. My dear, this is the life! If only Stan weren't a baby specialist and there weren't so many foolish women in the world!

I do try to see your mother occasionally. You won't mind my saying so, dear, but she does seem lonely and just a little frail. Couldn't you possibly write at home? Please don't think that I

am butting in, but you know I have always been quite crazy about your family — ever since the summer you took me in. I always remember you in my prayers because you introduced me to Stan. Really, Cal dear —

Caroline turned the letter over, a little surfeited with Stanley's virtues, though she fully appreciated them.

Betty went on:

Suppose you hear from Jimmy Ludlow once in awhile. Such a highbrow. Expect to see him senator or something from Colorado one of these days. Doesn't seem to take out anybody here — girls, I mean, though he does run over to San Francisco quite often. Maybe that's business, though you never can tell. Stan saw him out at the beach one night (the last time he was over there) with a party. I tried to find out about the woman end of it, but men never tell you anything; especially after they've been married five years, and yet Stan —

Caroline smiled as she put the letter back in its square, scented envelope, but her eyes were dimmed and sad. Should she go home? Was it her duty to go? She asked Leigh, who was always wise and honest.

“ I think that if you were really needed, Caro-

line, Father would send for you. Mother is too unselfish to demand your time simply for company. I doubt very much if you could command the work or the salary in the West that you are getting here."

That was the point exactly. Caroline was making a good and an honest living. Her salary had been raised until she now lived in comfort.

Claire was still across the hall and the acquaintance had ripened into real friendship. It was Claire who took Mayre's place and furbished up the apartment.

"I really think, Caroline," she said, "that you ought to use some of those lovely things Mr. McElroy sent to you." So Caroline unpacked the box and selected a few rugs, some silver and china; not much, but enough to give the room an air of comfort and refinement.

Claire had a beautiful time arranging them. When she had finished, the living room had a real atmosphere; it was homelike too, and Caroline was very grateful for the winged-back chair (Tevie had sent that also) and a few handsome pieces of linen that made the gate-legged table so attractive and appetizing when Claire set it for chance guests.

Sometimes, as Caroline dropped down on the sofa and looked up at the smiling face of Great-aunt Caroline, she fell to wondering about those ancestors that had passed on. She wondered about their hopes and aspirations, their sorrows and failures. She thought of dear old Madame Wakefield too, though she seldom heard from her any more. She sorrowed for her sometimes, so old and forlorn, her nearest and dearest snatched from her by a cruel war. She must write to her more often, she thought. If only there were time.

Time! She wondered if others felt the lack of it as she did. She was always busy during the day, and those week-ends at Leigh's precluded the possibility of writing or working. Leigh saw to it that she was quiet, and there was the precious little Carol to be romped with and wheeled down shady lanes in her cart. But she did have time to think during those long summer nights. Nights when fresh breezes carried the fragrance of Leigh's honeysuckle and late roses to her cot on the upper porch where she lay dreaming; odors that brought such poignant memories that sometimes she wished the breeze would change, dearly as she loved it. There was a certain odor about the mingling of honeysuckle and roses that

brought back childhood. She could see Maumy Rachel's fat black hand clutching a handful, her wide nostrils pressed against the sweet cool leaves.

“Ain't nothin' lak a rose,” she would say, holding one out to Caroline for a whiff. “I suttanly think the good Lord he mus' be'n pow'ful proud when he make a rose, Miss Caroline. Dat war a great day fer Him,” and she would bury her face again, sniffing and smiling.

There were other memories. Her first high-school dance. Jimmy had just returned from college. He had sent her a florist's boxful. Oh, the joy of that moment! Could she ever forget it? And another time—he had pinned a dark beauty in her hair, fumbling a little; she had called him stupid and, taking it away, thrust it through the lapel of his gray tweed coat, and the odor had mingled with tobacco and soap,—a masculine smell, fragrant and unmistakable. And another time, on the mesa——

Ah, those days! Unbearably sweet—unbearably dear. Would they ever come again? Would she succeed enough to warrant a return? She could not go back empty-handed.

Then she would turn her thoughts to her play,

trying to think out the troublesome scene. It came to her one afternoon, when she was wheeling little Carol under the leafy bowers of the avenue, — Leigh's small town boasted but one. She hastened home and wrote until well into the night.

CHAPTER XVI

CAROLINE'S PLAY

AUGUST was a trying month, hot and wearisome. Caroline drooped, but she remained at work, except for the customary two weeks given her as vacation. It was cooler at Leigh's, and since she could sleep as late as she liked (her porch was snug with awnings) and walk and dream in the afternoons, she preferred the drowsy little town to the seashore.

Her namesake was also a great attraction. She was beginning to toddle now, steadied by the older Caroline's finger, and to lisp "Pretty" and "Tante Ca'line," which entranced her doting relative. For hours they romped together in the early twilight and Caroline would carry her up to bed and croon Maumy's old songs to her until the little hand loosened its grip on her finger and the brown curls cosily adjusted themselves into the soft mattress. Leigh never permitted a pillow. Then Caroline would bend over her for a minute, perhaps lift a chubby hand for a last kiss,

straighten the light blanket, and tiptoe from the room.

No one knew, save Leigh, perhaps, how the child had wound itself about her heart. And little Carol, eager and responsive, was quite as doting. She would watch at the window for "Tante Ca'line" by the hour, scorning her playthings, calling sweetly as she pressed her face against the cool pane.

Yet Caroline worked during those two weeks. She had brought her typewriter with her, a larger, more efficient one now, and for hours at a stretch she banged away on it, perfecting and copying the play. It was done at last. She read it one night to Blair and Leigh (after much persuasion) and had the satisfaction of seeing their emotions stirred.

"It's a corker! I predict a three-years' run, Caroline," Blair said. "Wouldn't negotiate a loan on your prospects, would you?"

"I am quite sure it will be a success," Leigh added in her quiet way. "We shall all be so proud when it is really on the boards."

In September, Caroline began the rounds of the producers, those august men who sit in judgment on the world's best talent. It was difficult from

the first, for she had only the noon hour, which was always bad for business, and Saturday afternoon, when most men left their offices for the seashore or a round of golf. However, she managed at last to interest one pompous individual who gripped theatrical affairs in his stalwart hand, and made an appointment for four o'clock one Friday afternoon. Mr. Morrow, inclined to be obliging, allowed her the privilege of leaving the office an hour early, so that she reached the theater almost on time.

The magnate, seated behind a polished mahogany desk, took his cigar from his mouth and brought forth a chair for her. With a fluttering heart and a dry throat, she took the manuscript from her portfolio and laid it on the desk. Mr. Bergstroffer held the pages to the light. Presently he pushed it toward her with a request:

“ Maybe you had better read some of it yourself. I like to get the author's slant on a thing.”

It was the opportunity she had longed for, yet never dreamed of having. She was half through the first act, when she noticed the man before her squirm in his chair and then bend forward, a puzzled light in his black eyes.

“Where did you get on to this thing?” he asked curtly.

“The plot, you mean?” Caroline asked, lifting her own clear eyes.

“The whole business.”

“It came to me — slowly — evolved from an incident.”

He gave a dissatisfied grunt and told her to go on. It was in the third act that he stopped her. He had been listening intently, taking notes now and then on a pad that lay on the desk near at hand.

“Don’t believe you had better finish now,” he said to her great disappointment. “No use taking up your time and mine. The thing’s good, but you are a little late with it. Idea’s been used before. Fact is, we’re opening on its twin next week. Come around and see it. ‘David,’ the play’s called. Story of a man. Funny how these things run up against each other sometimes. Ain’t more than a half dozen plots in the whole list.”

“But this,” Caroline began.

He waved a pompous hand. “I tell you we’ve got practically the same thing, beginning next week. Sorry. Try again. You seem to have

talent. Keep in touch with me. Like to see what you do next."

She took the manuscript quietly, scarcely believing him. It was merely a ruse to get her out of the office. She knew all the tricks of business. She had seen them worked before. Even Mr. Morrow, very much the gentleman, had his subterfuges.

The information that Mr. Bergstroffer gave her did not alarm her in the least. It only made her think about the play more, viewing its possibilities from every side. But some two weeks later, passing down Broadway in the early evening, she looked up at a twinkling sign that wrote "David," and then blinked out again. For some minutes she stood watching it. Then another announcement came. "David. A Powerful Drama of Modern Times. The story of a man's struggle for self-mastery."

It was Friday and realizing that she would be free the next afternoon she went in the theater and bought two tickets. Leigh loved a good matinee, and Caroline enjoyed taking her. Money was much easier now that she had only herself to care for. She could afford good seats occasionally. It was not difficult to obtain them. The

play was new, though drawing splendidly, they said at the box office when she made inquiry.

Leigh met her early, so that they might have lunch together. They were in their seats at the theater in good time, laughing and chatting happily. Leigh always had so many cunning pranks of little Carol's to relate, to which the elder Caroline listened with delight. The men in the orchestra came out from under the stage and took their places. The music began; then the lights went out, hats came off, and there was a gentle rustling all over the house as people sat back, making themselves comfortable for the pleasure in store. The curtain had been up but a few moments when Caroline leaned forward, taking in every detail of the gorgeous stage setting. Leigh also strained closer.

It was an ornate, showy room. At the back of the stage, where a bay window looked out into a storm, filmly, deep-bordered lace curtains swept the floor. In the center of the window stood a growing palm, and back a little to one side, a deep velvet sofa stretched its handsome length before an artificial fire. Chairs were strewn about; rich and heavy; cabinets held a jumble of ornaments; statuary abounded.

Through the quiet room a bell jangled. A butler opened an outside door and admitted a young woman, wet from a storm. He took her umbrella and brought her in by the fire. She sat down on the sofa in a far corner. For a few moments there was silence. Then a noise at the door startled the girl. She looked up. Her glance fell upon a little boy, a furtive, restless child who seemed to be watching for some one ——

Caroline had straightened in her seat. Her face was very white. Her hands trembled.

The boy edged into the room, found a newspaper, took some sand from his pocket, letting it trickle through his fingers, chuckling as it struck the paper. He darted for the palm, took out a stick ——

Caroline's breath was coming quick and fast. Leigh reaching over took one of the trembling hands and held it close. The play went on.

At the end of the act Caroline rose and stumbled through a line of people for the aisle. Her eyes were wide and flaming. The old spots, the coffee grounds, had grown to twice their usual size. She was shaking from head to foot.

Leigh followed as rapidly as she could. Caroline was making for an office upstairs.



A door opened, Leigh followed Caroline in, and saw a heavy, stolid man. *Page 265.*

“ Dear! ” Leigh called, trying to catch her. “ Where are you going? ” Caroline seemed not to hear.

A door opened. Leigh followed Caroline in, saw a heavy, stolid man step forward. Heard Caroline's brown fists pounding on the mahogany desk; heard her say, her voice pitched high with excitement, “ Who gave you that play? Tell me his name. Tell me instantly! Where is Fleming DeCoursey? ”

Then, before the man could answer, she had fallen in a heap at his feet, dead to Leigh's entreaties.

Leigh scarcely remembered what happened after that. She only knew that the heavy, sordid face above her own became suddenly kind. That Blair was reached without difficulty, and that a few hours later they had Caroline at home, conscious, but raving excitedly.

For two weeks Caroline was very ill; brain fever the doctor said, watching her case with unusual interest. Leigh was almost distracted. Realizing how frail her mother had grown since Alison's death, she feared to telegraph her father, yet wondered how she dared keep the news from him. Doctor Bromley, the physician who had taken care

of all Blair's family, was her support and comfort. He felt quite sure that with Caroline's youth and the Ravenel inheritance she would weather the illness that had thrown them all into such a panic. Leigh blamed herself for that illness.

"I knew that she was breaking," she said to Blair, over and over again. "She seemed so worried of late, so very tired, but I thought it was the summer heat, to which she never could become accustomed after her mountain breezes. Sometimes I have fancied that she was trying to make up her mind about something ——"

"Could it be ——" Blair stopped.

"Jimmy? Sometimes I have thought so, Blair. She keeps that little picture of him on her desk — half hidden by papers — but there just the same. The boyish one — taken when he was at Princeton. You remember?"

Blair nodded. "Some kid Jim was in those days," he said with cousinly pride.

"I wonder, Blair, if we ought to tell him of her illness. If anything should happen ——" Tears filled her gentle eyes.

Weeks slipped into months. Caroline passed the danger line in safety. She was sitting up

now, weak and white, but safe, Leigh thought, as she brought her tempting broths and gelatine puddings. It was almost Christmas before she got about. The nurse had gone and Leigh and Alice were taking care of her — pushing her wheel chair into the sun parlor, lifting little Carol into her lap to amuse her.

She had never mentioned the play after those first ravings. Leigh sometimes wondered if pain had swept disappointment from her heart. She dared not ask her. The doctor had strictly forbidden mention of that heart-breaking day.

The weeks preceding Christmas were full of interest.

“We are going to make a special celebration this year,” Leigh said, “in honor of your recovery.”

“Oh, Leigh, you must not! I have been such a care and such an expense. It will take all my savings to pay the nurse and doctor.”

“Don't you worry about that. Doctor Bromley happened to know Father — and when Blair asked for his bill he refused to make one. Professional courtesy.”

“Leigh, he must not do that! Doctors need

their money so! I have it in the bank. I have been saving for a rainy day."

Caroline was up, walking about the house a week before Christmas. Her steps were slow and sometimes faltering, but she was gaining, in leaps and bounds, she said, when they asked her about her strength.

She was more beautiful than she had ever been. The russet tones in her cheeks had turned to ivory, yet a faint flush gave them life. Her beautiful thick hair was gone, but in its place tiny ringlets massed themselves, soft and brown as a thrush's wing. They clustered about her forehead and neck, giving her a boyish look that fascinated Leigh. She could scarcely take her eyes from her.

"You've grown younger, dear," she would say, trying to hide her admiration.

"That's good. I certainly was going downhill fast enough. How are the crow's feet?" Caroline asked.

Leigh smiled as she handed her a mirror. "See for yourself," she said.

Caroline looked, and a flush trailed her face. "I'm disreputably thin," she said.

"You are just in style."

Caroline took a longer look. Yes, they were gone, those tracking lines that were beginning to show at the corners of her eyes. She was glad. A sudden thought leaped to her mind, deepening the flush to scarlet.

As Christmas approached, Blair was mysteriously happy. He hummed an air as he shaved in the morning and joked with Caroline every time he came into her presence. Leigh had her own suspicions, but she said nothing. The day before Christmas he took her to one side.

“When I come home to-night try to have Caroline out of the way. Keep her upstairs in your sitting room if you can.”

“Why, dear?”

“Just — never mind why,” Blair said, leaving a kiss on the upturned face.

She did as he bade her, though Caroline was restless and wanted to go below and play with Carol in the firelight.

“Alice will put more wood on here,” Leigh said and rang the bell.

Caroline was down on the hearthrug building her namesake a house with square red blocks when the front door slammed.

“ Blair is early to-night, isn't he? ” she asked, pausing for a moment.

“ I believe he is,” Leigh answered as she went to meet him.

A moment later—it could only have been a moment—Caroline had finished the house that her small niece mischievously swept into a pile, and she had whisked her into her arms and was pressing kisses on the back of her fat little neck, when the door opened.

She look up, expecting to see Blair in the doorway, hear his hearty, “ Well, how's the invalid to-night? ”

But it was not Blair. Another man stood there. A man with anxious, eager eyes. He took a step forward, came into the room, closing the door softly behind him.

Caroline scrambled to her feet. For a moment her hand caught at her heart, it was racing so madly, so joyously; then she moved forward into the arms stretched so hungrily toward her.

The next moment she was hiding her happy tears on Jimmy Ludlow's gray tweed coat.

CHAPTER XVII

A HAPPY CHRISTMAS AND A WEDDING

THAT was a Christmas never to be forgotten. Caroline, despite the fact that she had sat up rather late for an invalid the night before, came downstairs bright and early.

Leigh had preceded her. She was busy putting the last touches to the Christmas tree, surrounding it with packages, lighting the candles.

Caroline, coming in softly, threw an arm over her sister's shoulder.

“Leigh, dear,” she said, holding her tighter, “I wanted to speak to you for a moment — alone. Leigh — look! Kiss me, dear, and wish me happiness — not that wishes will help. I’m bursting with it already!”

She thrust out her thin brown hand, waving it a little to watch a diamond on her third finger sparkle in the candlelight.

“Caroline! Oh, my dear, I am so glad! So glad I can’t say anything.”

She turned her sister about and looked into her shining eyes.

“ It's Jimmy —— ”

They both laughed.

“ Who else, honey? ”

“ Caroline! Blair will be crazy —— ”

She ran to the stairway and called to him softly.
“ Blair, dear, hurry! I can't wait a minute; hurry, *hurry — please!* ”

Caroline had never seen Leigh so excited. Leigh seldom ran. She came back in a moment, holding Blair by the lapel of his coat.

“ Blair, look! ” she said and drew Caroline closer. “ Kiss your sister and wish her —— ”

“ You needn't, Blair. Wishes don't mean a thing to me — maybe I may need them later. Just now, if they came true — and I were any happier — I might have a relapse. I couldn't stand it.”

Blair took her hand and gave the ring a scrutinizing glance.

“ When is this — this extraordinary event to take place? ” he asked, kissing her cheek as he was bidden.

“ As soon as it can be arranged,” Caroline answered, the old russet hue creeping warmly into

her cheeks. "Will you stand for a wedding — here?"

"Caroline," Blair said, and his eyes made good his words, they were so seriously kind, "I'll stake you to half my kingdom. That's as far as I can go; Leigh owns everything else."

When Jimmy came down from the guest room on the floor above (where Leigh had insisted upon his staying, as Oak Hills boasted no hotel) there were more congratulations.

They were a splendid couple, Blair thought, as he watched them at breakfast; Jimmy, tall and protecting, with the air of a business man, a man of affairs; just enough older to make life interesting and worth while to the lovely girl who sat beside him, glancing up radiantly when he spoke, drinking in his every word with pride and pleasure.

Blair was impatient.

"Has the day been set yet?" he asked, almost draining the syrup pitcher as he flooded his hot cakes. His eyes were on Caroline. She was so entrancingly lovely with the new bloom upon her.

"It has!" Jimmy said so quickly that they all laughed. "It will occur one week from to-day at noon. Caroline thinks that will give Leigh time

to serve a breakfast and get us to the pier at four o'clock."

"To the pier!"

"We are sailing, Leigh dear," Caroline said, "for England. Jimmy had to run over on business, and he thought I might go along" — she looked up at him affectionately — "and keep him out of mischief. I understand that he has been in the habit of running over to San Francisco occasionally — for parties ——"

"He'll bear watching, all right," Blair added, and Jimmy, reaching over, pulled one of Caroline's tiny curls and then patted it softly.

"Who gave you all this information?" he asked.

"Oh, a little bird," Caroline flung; "robins migrate — even from California."

An exciting week followed. Caroline had wired her father and had received a night letter that among other things said, "January first will be the happiest day of my life. My love and sincere congratulations to you both."

Caroline was very busy. The apartment, tiny as it was, had to be dismantled, work finished and turned over to Mr. Morrow. There was genuine regret at the office when Caroline made known

her plans. Even Mr. Morrow, silent and dignified, had rather a lost look when Caroline related her intentions.

“ I don’t know just how we are going to fill your place, Miss Ravenel,” he said, “ but after meeting Mr. Ludlow, I rather think we shall have to.”

Jimmy was also occupied during that week. Visits to Mr. Bergstroffer kept him busy and interested. The august man had quailed a little under Jimmy’s sharp questions and scrutinizing eyes. There was a look in those gray depths that was beginning to be feared in the Colorado courts. Mr. Bergstroffer was not slow to recognize it. Before the end of the week “ David ” had blinked itself out on Broadway, the papers announcing that the play was in litigation. Caroline did not know, but Jimmy’s business in England was with Mr. Fleming DeCoursey, who had gone abroad to place the rights to his stolen production. Blair had not been idle. He had put the case before Jimmy by wire and letter before Jimmy reached New York.

There was not much time during that busy week for shopping, even had Caroline been fortunate enough to have money for her trousseau. The doctor’s and the nurse’s bills had, as she feared,

taken all of her savings. She paid them gladly, happy that she had been able to provide for the emergency.

Leigh said to her one morning:

“Don't you think, Caroline, that the time has come when we could open some of Alison's things. It is wrong to put them away to decay and go out of fashion. They are too beautiful to give to ordinary people who might need clothes — and one could scarcely offer them to friends.”

And Caroline had answered quietly:

“I was thinking of that, Leigh. I shall need a few things, not many; Jimmy insists that he is going to buy my trousseau in London, which is of course absurd — a little out of a husband's province.”

Alison's trunks had been sent to Leigh's attic. They had never been unlocked, and Leigh and Caroline both dreaded opening them. They chose a stormy afternoon to look through the things and found the task less difficult than they had anticipated.

Caroline had packed the frocks carefully, and as she took them out, one by one, and held them to the light, she resolved not to let her feelings overcome her judgment. Surely Alison, different as

she was from her sisters, would prefer that they share her possessions. They sorted and sifted, choosing garments that under Leigh's skilful fingers would serve Caroline admirably. Few changes were necessary.

So, it was with real affection, perhaps stronger than she had felt during Alison's lifetime, that Caroline held the intimate things lovingly in her arms, — dumb garments that spoke so poignantly of her sister.

In one of the drawers, stowed carefully beneath delicate lingerie, they came upon a faded velvet box. Caroline drew it forth tenderly.

“Alison's pearls,” she said thoughtfully, letting the beautiful beads slip through her fingers. “Don't you remember, Leigh, how she always longed for them; way back in those childhood days? ‘My pearls,’ she would say, ‘that are to come to me when Great-aunt dies!’ I can see her now.”

Leigh smiled wanly. “Poor great-aunt,” she said. “If she could only have known how you children longed for her possessions!”

“I wonder what ever became of her,” Caroline mused. “Was she a truly flesh-and-blood person, Leigh?”

“ Why, of course. When you go to England, why not try to trace her? I think I could get her husband's name out of the old Kirtley Bible. I have it, you know.”

Caroline's face brightened. “ What fun! ” she said. “ But of course she has been dead — for ages! ”

“ She ought not to be much older than Maumy. I remember hearing Mother say that Maumy, as a little girl, used to fetch and carry for her. Why did we never ask Maumy about her? ”

“ Why did we never ask Maumy about a heap of things? ” Caroline whispered softly.

She laid the pearls back in the box and handed them to Leigh.

“ You must have them,” she said. “ Who do you suppose ever sent them to Alison? ”

Leigh put the box back in Caroline's hands.

“ I want you to keep them, dear,” she said with her usual generosity. “ I don't know who sent them — but I have often wondered ” — Caroline looked up — “ if perhaps it might have been Madame Wakefield.”

“ Madame Wakefield! Why should she be giving Alison pearls? ”

Leigh shook her head. “ I really don't know,

except that she was very rich, and she lived across the street and was so friendly," she finished lamely.

Caroline laughed. "Leigh, how extraordinary! As if living across the street and being friendly ——"

"I know, it sounds ridiculous, but just the same ——" She stopped, checked by Caroline's amused expression.

"There was something a little queer about it all, anyway. And Maumy used to go over there so much. I found her stealing away at night, carrying cookies and beaten biscuit."

"I know. She told me ——"

"And staying so long. But when I spoke to her she said, 'Madame, she like down-Souf cooking, Miss Leigh, and that white gal o' hern don't know a beat-up biscuit from a baked tater!'"

They both laughed. Suddenly Caroline sobered, and a horrified look came over her face. "Leigh!" she exclaimed, catching hold of her sister's arm. "She couldn't possibly have been — *Great-aunt Caroline!*"

"I don't know who she was. I have often wondered."

"Of course, she couldn't have been, but if she

were! Heavens, the things we used to say! Remember the time Alison came home from Europe? Madame was calling that day. The things Alison said about English women — and Great-aunt; how she was some day going to leave her pearls to her. Leigh! It makes me shiver! Positively cold! It was only a little while after that the pearls came.”

“Don’t trust that fertile imagination of yours too much,” Leigh said. “I think probably Madame Wakefield may have once lived in the South, but as for being our relative — that’s going a little too far.”

“I truly hope so,” Caroline said, as she selected the things she wished to take downstairs, the velvet box pressed tight in her hand.

She really had no intention of keeping the pearls. The thought came to her that she would put them safely away for her little namesake.

Caroline’s wedding day dawned bright and clear.

“Isn’t it strange how Fate takes a hand in all our plans?” she said, as she slipped into the seal-brown broadcloth that was to serve for wedding and traveling dress. “I always supposed that if I married, though I never thought I should, I

would go quietly up to the Falls at home, with the birds and chipmunks for guests, and let dear old Doctor Aurendel read the service with my family grouped about, and here I am —— ”

“ Honoring us,” Leigh finished, straightening the brown velvet toque that set so snugly over Caroline’s ringlets. “ Are you quite ready? Here are your gloves and flowers. I have never seen you half so beautiful! If only Father could see you! ”

Leigh wished that she had not given way to her thoughts. A spasm of pain crossed Caroline’s face.

“ It is the only drawback to perfect happiness,” she said softly — “ his absence, and Mother’s. But I shall soon be with them — in a cottage of my own, where I can run in upon them daily. Kiss me, Leigh dear. You have been mother and sister in one. I can never thank you for all you have done for me.”

Simplicity marked the event in every particular. The long drawing-room was still bright with Christmas greens and Leigh had added, here and there, long-stemmed roses, arranged loosely in tall vases.

Caroline stood in the bay window, the dull win-

ter light falling softly across her face, sobered, even with so great happiness. She kept her eyes upon the young clergyman's until he said, "I now pronounce you man and wife," and Jimmy slipped a wedding ring upon her finger. Then, for a brief second, she glanced up at her husband, her amber eyes glowing with love and adoration. Jimmy's own glance was equally luminous.

It was a little hard to say good-by to Leigh, for all Caroline was so happy, and Baby Carol refused to loosen her grasp upon "Tante Ca'line's" finger. "Go too, go too," she cried until Jimmy suggested putting her in his overcoat pocket. That mode of traveling did not appeal to her.

But they were off at last, in the waiting taxi, blowing their farewell kisses through the closed window — January had not been kind in the way of weather — calling messages and last requests.

As long as the taxi was in sight, Leigh saw Caroline looking back, smiling through happy tears.

CHAPTER XVIII

GREAT-AUNT CAROLINE

NEITHER Jimmy nor Caroline would have chosen January for a visit to England, but circumstances often alter plans. The trip was a joyous one nevertheless. The weather, although crisp and sharp, was calm enough to permit daily walks on deck or an occasional afternoon spent in steamer chairs, beneath warm rugs.

To sit beside Jimmy for long hours at a stretch, to hear him talk of business, world conditions, civic activities in their own home, was a dreamed-of joy. Caroline herself was so awake, so interested in topics of the day, so full of plans for the future, that the hours were not half long enough to visit and dream.

Sometimes those conversations turned on subjects half-forgotten; boy and girl days spent in the mountains; Jimmy's escapades at college; Caroline's at her sorority. And those later days when he felt that he had lost her. Sometimes his

hand would reach out and, finding hers, press tightly as if she might elude him.

Carefully Jimmy had broached the subject of her play and of Fleming DeCoursey's perfidy. At first Caroline would not discuss it.

"Let us forget it, Jimmy," she said generously. "It was a terrible blow, of course, but I have thought it all out ——" For a moment she was silent, her eyes gazing far over the water.

"You know," she said presently, "I can almost understand it in a way. Temptation is such a frightful thing to meet and battle with. There were times at the office ——" She hesitated, as if loathing to bare her own soul before the clear gray eyes above her.

"There were manuscripts — that passed through my hands, unspeakable ones, so far as style and English went, but — with such possibilities; a scene, atmosphere, plot; useless to the creator without technique and taste and — what shall I say — sympathy with life — it takes all that to build a story ——"

She stopped again.

"I remember one in particular. Well, there it was. Mine for the taking. I could have changed names, places, twisted the plot, revised it so that

it would have deceived its own mother — brain children have mothers, you know, very tender ones, but something within me here ” — she laid her hand on her heart — “ said no ; no ! no ! Not a word, not a thought ! I don’t know what it was that spoke within me : inheritance, blood, perhaps — or training. Most of all it was Major’s training, Jimmy. Always he thundered in my ears. Be honest ! Once —— ”

She broke off again and looked up. The gray eyes were tender now ; she could go on. “ Once when I was a very little girl, I came home one day with a beautiful new piece of chalk. You know how lovely chalk looks to a child when it is all smooth and round. The teacher had opened a special box. I saw it on her desk, and when her back was turned I took a piece — it was blue, I remember, a heavenly blue, bright and gay. I hid it in my pocket, but somehow I didn’t like it there — it — it seemed to burn a hole in it. I remember feeling of it to see if it were hot.

“ I took it home to lunch and laid it beside my plate at table. Major saw it. I tried to roll it under my plate. He must have been watching my face, for when I looked up and caught his eyes, they too were burning holes.

“ ‘ Where did you get it, Caroline? ’ he asked.

“ ‘ At school,’ I said.

“ ‘ Did the teacher give it to you? ’ he inquired.

“ I tried to say yes, but my lips refused to move.

“ After lunch he took me in his office —and got the story out of me. I had seen the chalk, wanted it, and when the teacher’s back was turned, took it.

“ I shall never forget the look in his eyes. He held the chalk in his hand for a moment looking at it, then laid it in mine.

“ ‘ I want you to take this back to Miss Brown, Caroline,’ he said, ‘ and tell her just how you got it.’

“ I begged and plead with him. He was adamant.

“ Never, not even that awful day when I watched my own play acted before my eyes, have I suffered as I did then; but I did as I was bade. I gave Miss Brown the chalk and said — ‘ I have brought this back — I took it out of your box — when you weren’t looking. ’ ”

She was choking now as she told the story and her eyes filled with tears. “ My father could not have done me a nobler service. That lesson in humility has gone through the years with me,

branded me with honesty. I have been hoping, Jimmy, that Fleming DeCoursey would come to me — save his own soul — for he has damned it beyond self-gratification. My play can do him no good — scorching him mind and heart! ”

She wondered why Jimmy got up so abruptly and took a sudden turn along the deck. When he came back he changed the subject, but his eyes were still thoughtful.

They landed at Liverpool on a drab wet morning, going directly to London. Caroline was anticipating a visit with her old friend, Madame Wakefield, so as soon as they were comfortably located, they went out to her country home.

She was scarcely prepared for the changes in her old friend. Caroline found her propped among her pillows, a victim of asthma; she had always been more or less afflicted with it. Caroline remembered how she had puffed and wheezed at home in the high altitude. She seemed very feeble and Caroline realized, as she held her wasted hand, that she was nearing the end of life's long journey. She insisted upon Caroline and Jimmy spending a week-end at the Towers, a fine old estate set at the edge of the woods. And, although they accepted the invitation gladly, she

could only visit with them for a few minutes at a time. Her breath came in such short, painful gasps that it was an effort to speak.

But one twilight, after tea, before the lamps were lighted, when the firelight filled the quaint room with rosy shadows, she called Caroline to her side. She seemed better than she had been since Caroline's arrival.

"Jimmy must sit here," she said, pointing to a low chair beside her; Caroline was on the other side. "There is much that I want to say to you both. Much that I want you to do for me after I am gone." The thin hand that lay in Caroline's pressed closer.

"I want to tell you a little story," she began, "the story of a young Virginia girl who came to England when she was very young——" She stopped and looked down lovingly at Caroline. "Do you know who she was?" she asked and paused.

A flush swept Caroline's face. She could not speak. Her conversation with Leigh passed through her mind; but she leaned forward and said frankly:

"She could not possibly have been — *Caroline Kirtley!*"

“ She was — exactly,” Madame Wakefield repeated slowly. “ Caroline Kirtley — your great-aunt. Look up at her, dear — old and feeble and forlorn now; but once young and happy and lovely as you are.”

For a moment there was a deathly silence. Jimmy had half turned in his seat and was looking up into the old face reverently; outside in the trees, the wind sighed and murmured; a clock on the mantel ticked loudly.

Caroline rose and, putting an arm about the shrunken form propped in the snowy pillows, laid her head beside the aged one.

“ How can you ever forgive us,” she said brokenly, “ *ever, ever?* The way we joked and talked about you.”

Madame turned the scarlet face about and left a kiss on the ringlets that curled above the shamed eyes.

“ My dear child — I was simply a myth to you; do not give it a thought. Let me tell you my story while I have the strength.”

When she had finished, Caroline drew a quick breath.

“ And Maumy knew all the time? ” she asked, scarcely crediting her own question.

“ Yes, Maumy knew. Her sharp eyes looked through age and destruction. She promised not to tell. She never did? ”

“ No — she never did,” Caroline answered, and her mind was busy with that last hour of Maumy's. She could see those black, beady eyes straining toward her; hear her eager question, “ I ain't said nothing I hadn't orter, has I? ” No, Maumy had been faithful to the end.

“ One other knew,” Madame went on; “ your father. I went to him because I wanted to do something for you, my namesake, but he refused my offer. He wished you to carve your own future. I hope that you have been successful; he was so sure of your ability and worth! ” She paused for a little while, musing, then went on.

“ There is little more to say. The war made sad havoc in my family. My nephews are both gone; after my servants have been pensioned, and my friends — the few that are near and dear have been looked after — you, Caroline, must have the rest of my belongings; this old estate which I have loved, my land and jewels ——”

At the word jewels, Caroline looked up.

“ It was you — Madame ” (she could not yet

say Aunt Caroline), “who sent Alison the pearls?”

“Yes, who else? They belonged to her. She had claimed them in her childhood.” She laughed softly. “And you — let me see, you wanted a circus. Well, there are horses in the stables, many of them ——”

“And Mayre has all the time she wishes to study art; that was her dream. Some one must have waved a fairy wand over us. Oh, what wretched little youngsters we were, prating so!”

Madame was beginning to droop again. Together Jimmy and Caroline rearranged her pillows and her maid came to wheel her away.

“You will meet my lawyer here to-morrow morning, Jimmy,” she said, as she left the room. “At ten o’clock; please be prompt. I shall try to be with you.”

CHAPTER XIX

CAROLINE'S CAREER

THREE years have passed since that morning conference in Madame Wakefield's drawing-room, three busy happy years for Jimmy and Caroline. Madame Wakefield has long since passed to her reward. In New York, where a flashing sign once spelled "David," another word shines forth, "GROOVED." The word blinks off and on, and under it follows, "A GRIPPING PLAY OF MODERN TIMES."

Occasionally, when they are in New York, Jimmy and Caroline stand before that sign, watching it glow and fade, and sometimes Caroline says with a sigh, "Poor Femmy DeCoursey! I so often think of him and wonder where he is. I can never forget that day you brought him to me in London. His humility haunts me."

"DeCoursey is a man now, wherever he is, thanks to your generosity, Caroline," Jimmy answers, looking into his wife's blooming face.

“Some day we shall hear of his success. Fate is kind to the brave.”

But the young Ludlows spend very little time in New York, or in London, despite their interests there. The Towers, now Caroline's property, has been let to careful tenants, and Madame Wakefield's other interests transferred to America.

Far out in the West, in the shadow of a blue mountain, a new house has reared its roofs and gables. In one of the upper chambers where the west window reveals a pink afterglow that trails along the Peak, and gives a regal view of its white cap in winter, Caroline still writes and dreams.

An ideal life goes on within those walls. Sometimes the Major, with his frail wife leaning heavily upon his arm, walks the short distance that intervenes between their house and Caroline's, to have dinner with the “the children.” Sometimes Mr. and Mrs. Ludlow, Senior, join them, and sometimes there are visitors from California: Biddy and Mayre with their two babies; the heavenly twins, Jimmy calls them, Bobby and Betty, lively and mischievous.

Sometimes there are other guests: Margaret McIntosh, who loves to sit in the firelight and discuss “cases” with Jimmy, while Caroline sews

on little garments that worry her impatient fingers; never adept with a needle.

Eunice Middleton drops in too, once in a while, and brings Uncle Jeff, upon whom she bestows loving care. Eunice is pretty and capable and worthwhile, so Jimmy says, and Caroline thinks Jimmy knows.

It is only occasionally that "a career" is mentioned in the household. When it is, Caroline leads the way to a large chamber on the third floor swept with pure mountain breezes, and lifting a wee laddie from a substantial bassinet, lays him in his adoring father's arms.

"There he is, dear," she says softly: "*my career* — his blessed majesty — Jimmy, Junior!"

THE END.

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